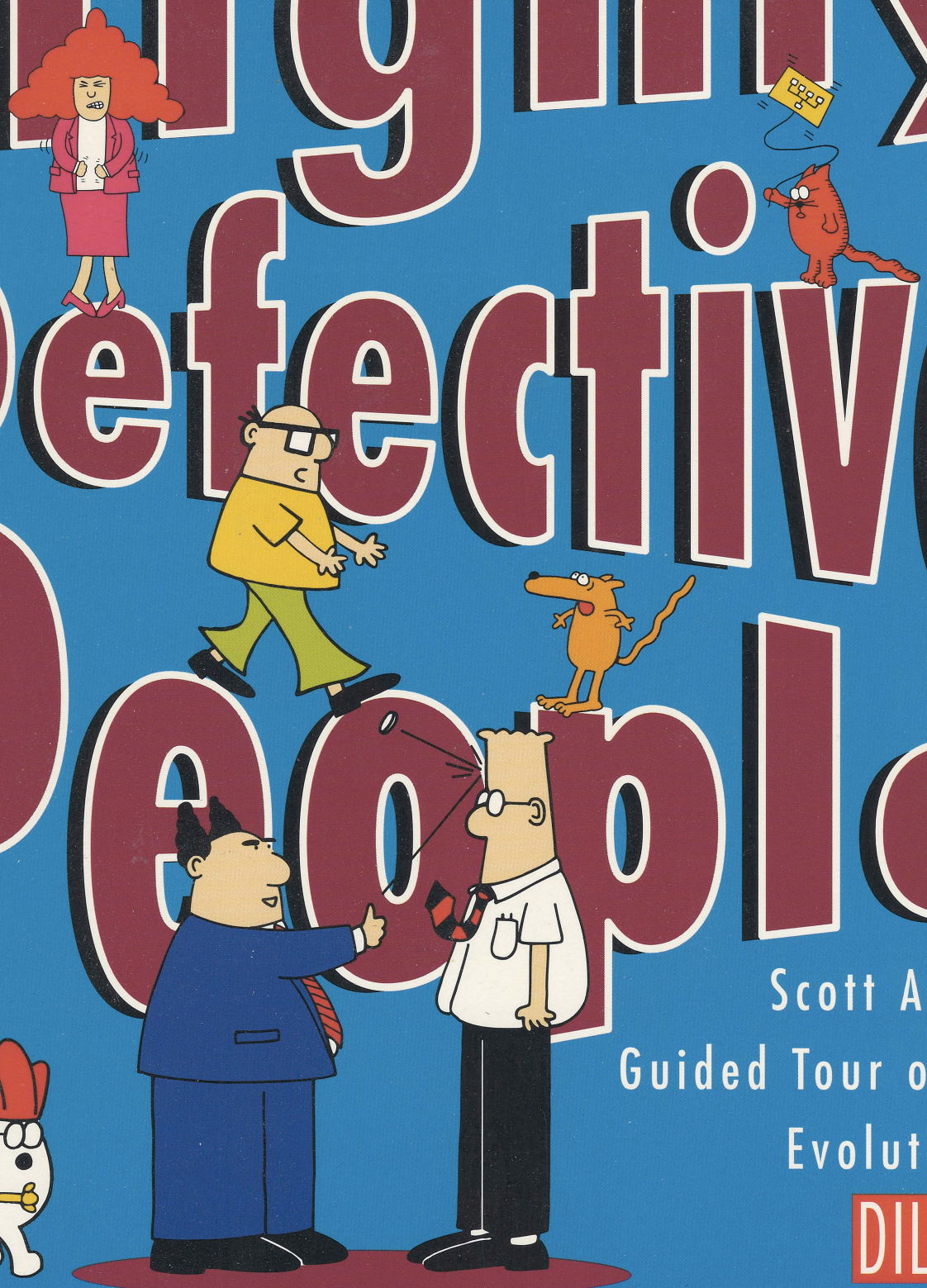
SEVEN YEARS of

Highly Defective People



Scott Adams' Guided Tour of the Evolution of DILBERT®

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SEVEN YEARS of

Highly Defective People

Scott Adams' Guided Tour of the Evolution of DILBERT®

BY SCOTT ADAMS

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Yeah, yeah it's for Pam.

CONTENTS

Contents

- Introduction 7

- Dilbert 8
  - . . . at Home with Dogbert 11
  - . . . and Technology 17
  - . . . in the Business World 27
  - . . . and Women 62
  - . . . and His Ego 70
  - . . . Dies 72
  - . . . Travels 74
  - . . . Attempts to Join the Consumer Society 75

- Dogbert 80
  - . . . the Early, Vulnerable Days 82
  - . . . Reveals His Sarcasm 92
  - . . . the Many Occupations 100
  - . . . Schemes to Conquer the World 111
  - . . . Saving Dilbert 125

- Ratbert 128

- Garbageman 138

- Liz 142

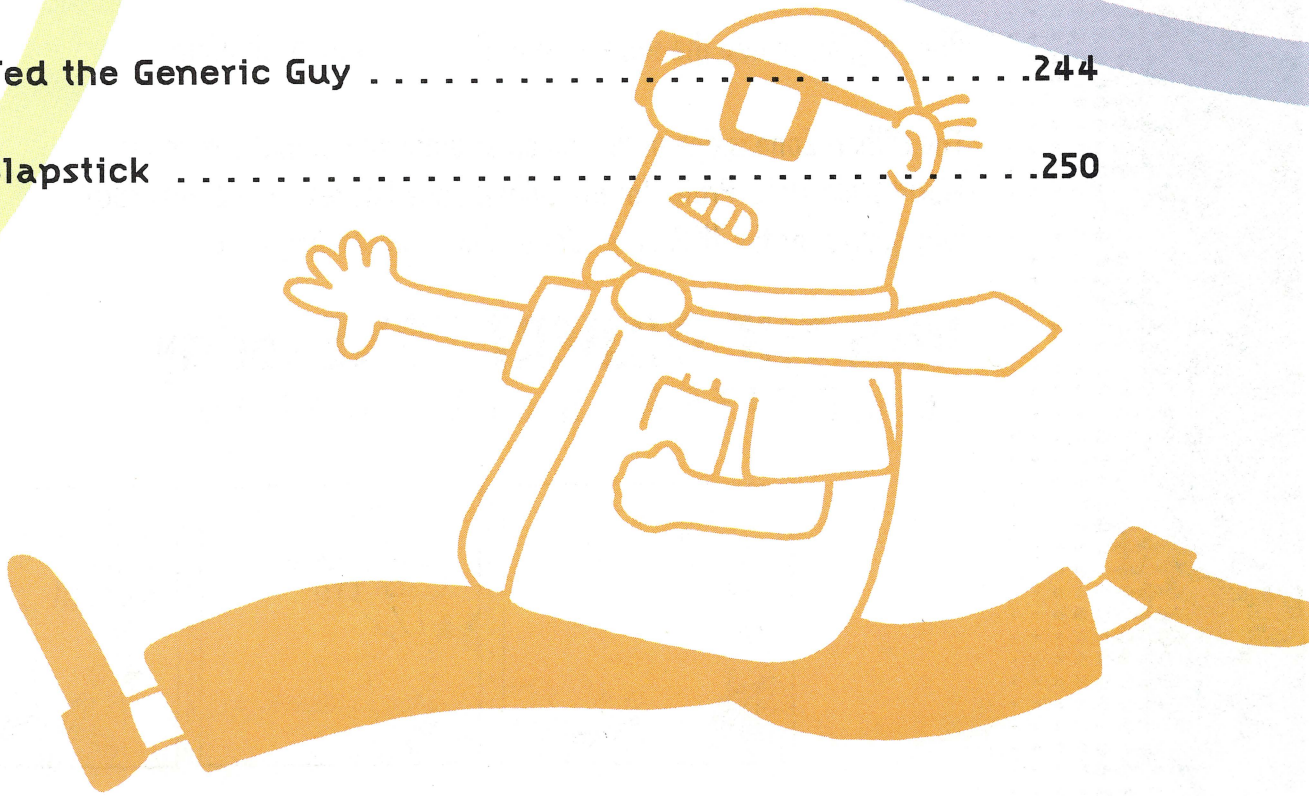
- Mom and Dad 150

- Bob the Dinosaur 154

- Catbert 162

- Phil 168

- Asok 174
- Tina the Tech Writer 178
- Elbonians 184
- The Boss 188
- Alice 208
- Wally 216
  . . . and Hygiene Issues 224
- Carol 226
- Critters 230
- Dogbert in Hats 240
- Ted the Generic Guy 244
- Slapstick 250



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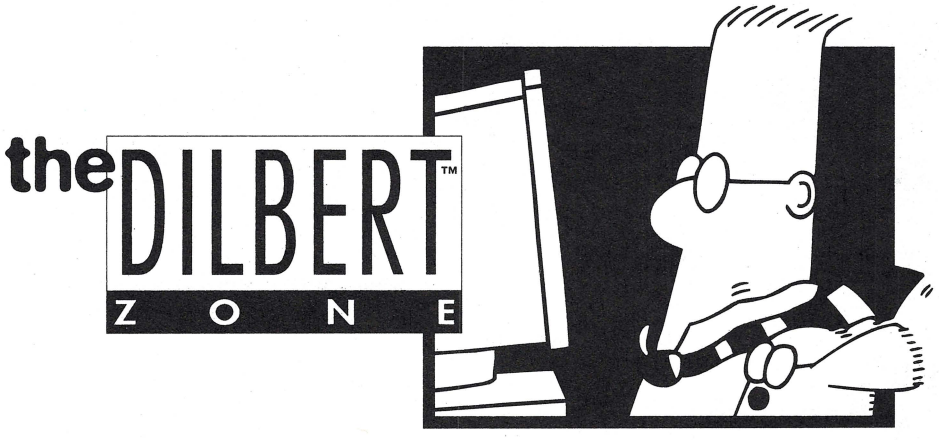

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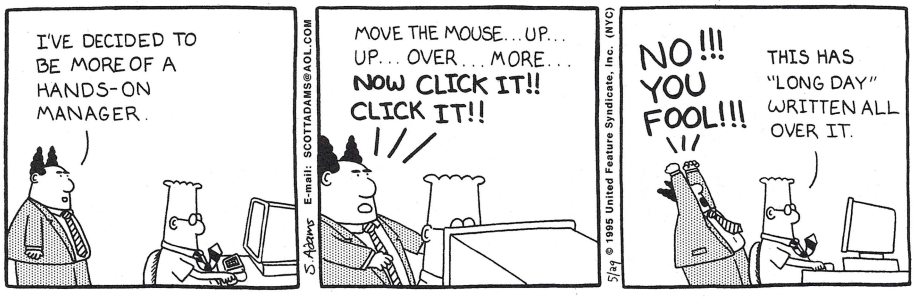

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Introduction

You'll see a bunch of semi-legible, handwritten notes in the margins of this book. Those are mine. It's best to read each cartoon first and then the related note. Some of the notes are fascinating insights into the world of cartooning. Other notes are interesting only for their poor grammar and spelling, thus proving that you can be a moron and still have a successful career as a cartoonist. Either way, it's inspirational.

I made all of the notes in three sittings. I stopped only long enough to rest my weary hand. The thoughts are off the top of my head – which I can prove — because there's a little bald spot where the thoughts took off.

My hand is weary. That means the introduction is done.

Scott Adams

I was heavily into puns in the early days.

Dilbert was a doodle long before he had a name. He was a composite of my co-workers at Crocker Bank and later Pacific Bell. I worked with a lot of technical people and noticed that many of them had potato-shaped bodies and glasses. When I morphed them together in my brain they became Dilbert. I suppose I doodled the technical people more than other people because they seemed more interesting to me, both in personality and in appearance.

I'm often asked why Dilbert has no mouth and why his necktie curls up. The truth is that I don't know. The best answer I can give is that "it looks right." As a doodle, he was never drawn exactly the same. There were times in his doodle-days when he had a mouth and a flat tie. His body and head shape have changed gradually. He even had visible eyes once. In time I developed a preference for what "looked right" with him. It would be easy to interpret his lack of mouth and his uncontrolled necktie as symbols of his powerlessness, but I can't claim to be that clever. All I know is that I like him drawn that way.

I drew the little pre-Dilbert character to add interest to my own presentations at work. Sometimes I'd draw rebellious cartoons on the whiteboard of my cubicle for the amusement of my co-workers. People started wondering what his name was. It seemed appropriate to give him one. So I had a "Name the Nerd" contest on my whiteboard and invited people to write their suggestions below his picture.

Several people wrote in their suggestions, but none of them seemed right. Then a truly strange thing happened. My friend

Mike Goodwin stopped by to tell me he had the name. He picked up the erasable marker and wrote "Dilbert."

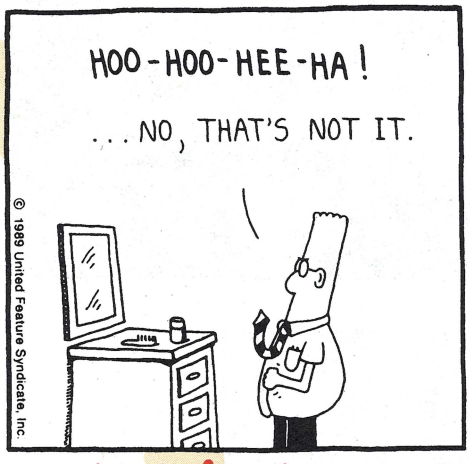
I ended the contest immediately and declared Mike the winner.

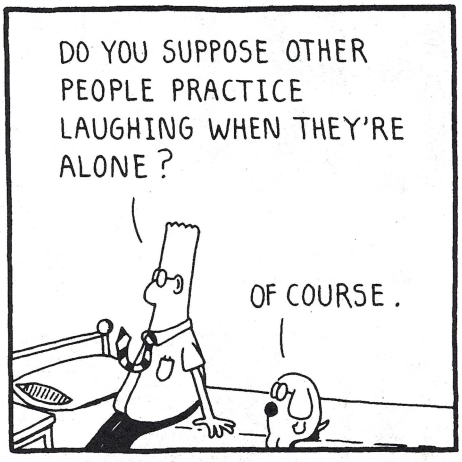
The strange thing is that there was a real sense of destiny about that moment. It didn't feel like Dilbert was being given a name, it felt like I was finding out what his name already was. I can't explain the feeling exactly, except that I knew it was important even then. It was a rare moment of complete clarity, when I knew I was in exactly the right place at the right time.

Much later, after Dilbert became syndicated, Mike realized how he had probably come up with the name. Mike's father had been a navy aviator during World War II and Mike still had some of his old navy documents and publications. In them were some cartoons that were well known to navy pilots of that period—cartoons about an incompetent pilot named Dilbert. The navy Dilbert, by a cartoonist named Osborn, appeared in single panel cartoons used to demonstrate what a pilot should never do by showing what happened when Dilbert did them all.

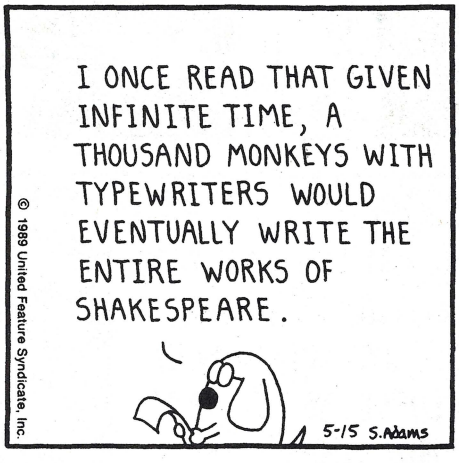
Had I known about the navy Dilbert cartoons I would have changed the name of mine, but it was too late by that point, happily. I'm glad to carry on the Dilbert tradition, albeit accidentally.

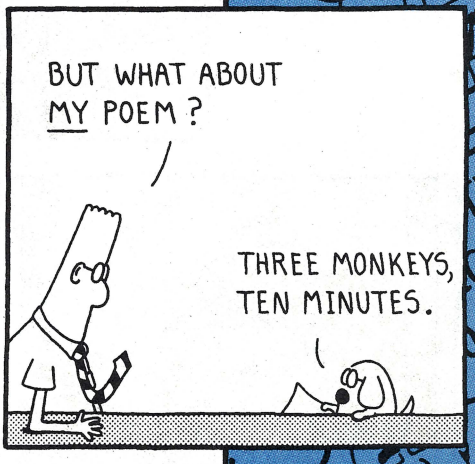
...at Home with Dogbert

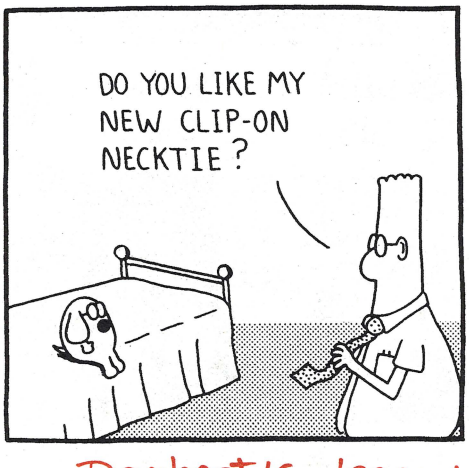


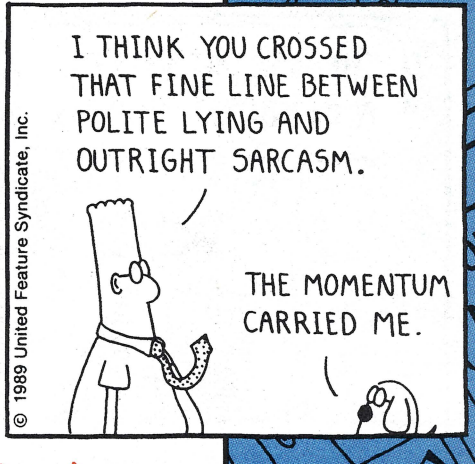


At first, Dogbert was the voice of Dilbert's insecurities.





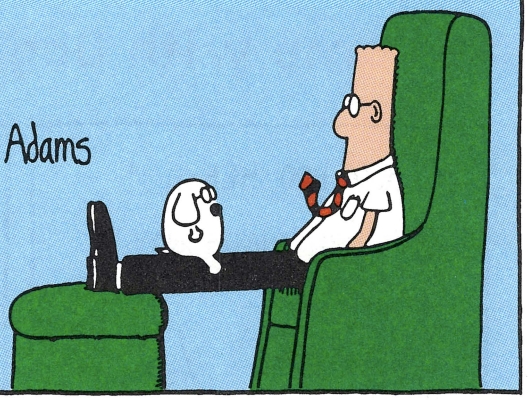


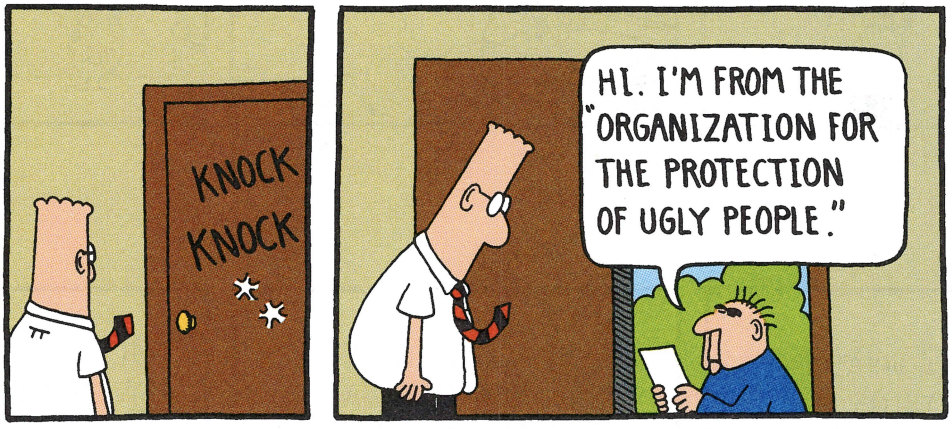


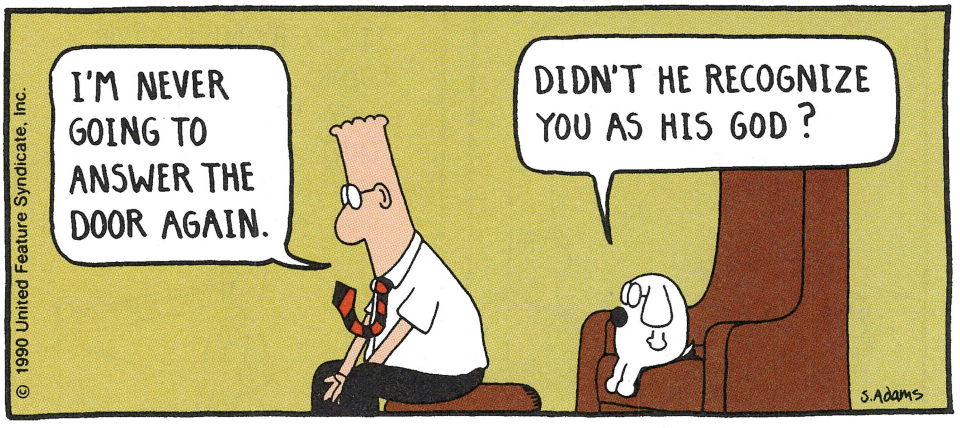
Dogbert's legs were tiny in the beginning.

DILBERT®

By Scott Adams



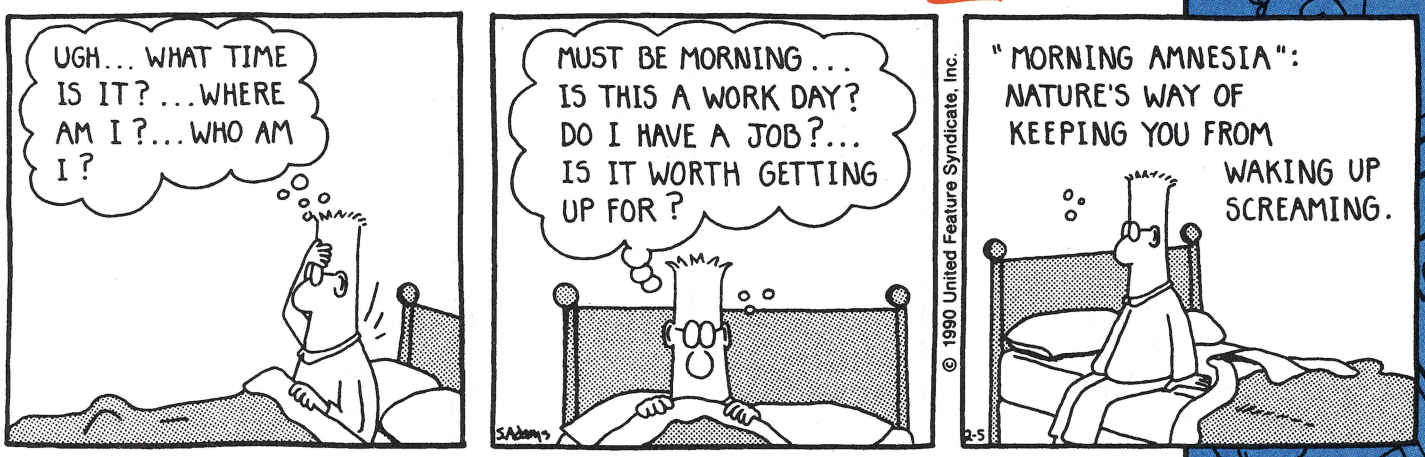




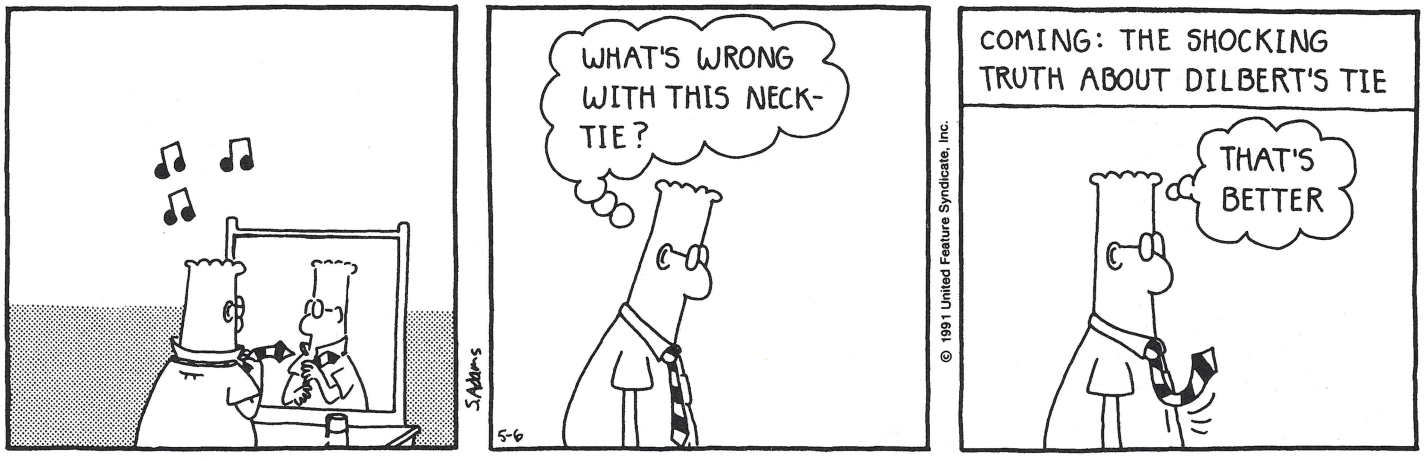
why are homely people discriminated against? we're the majority!

I shouldn't give away my secrets...to you weasels.

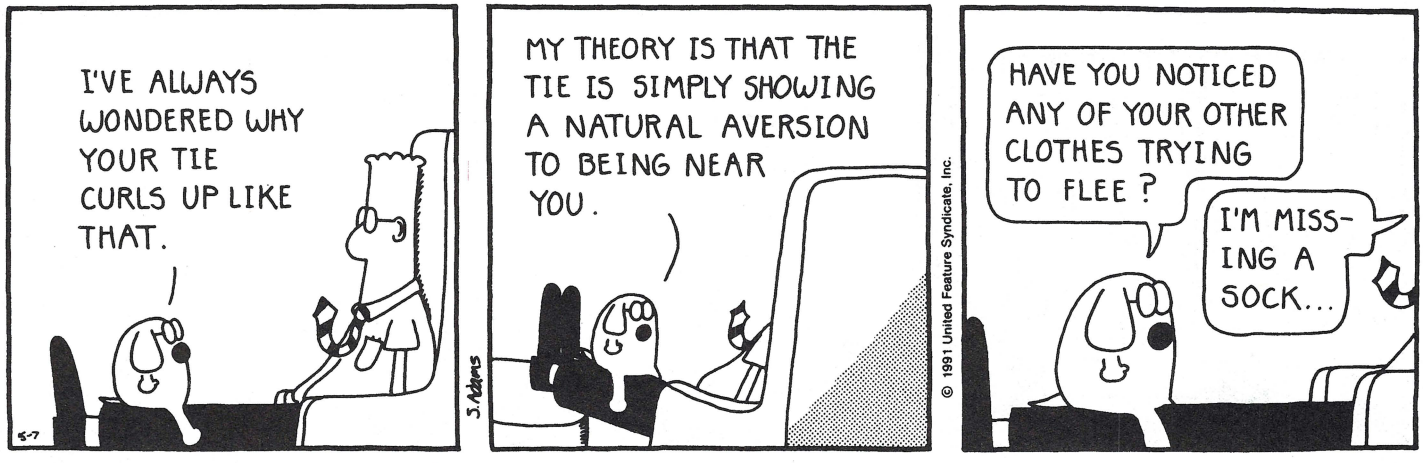
This joke was inspired by a friend who said his house "overlooked a mountain." It's the same pattern. How can you overlook a mountain? They're huge.



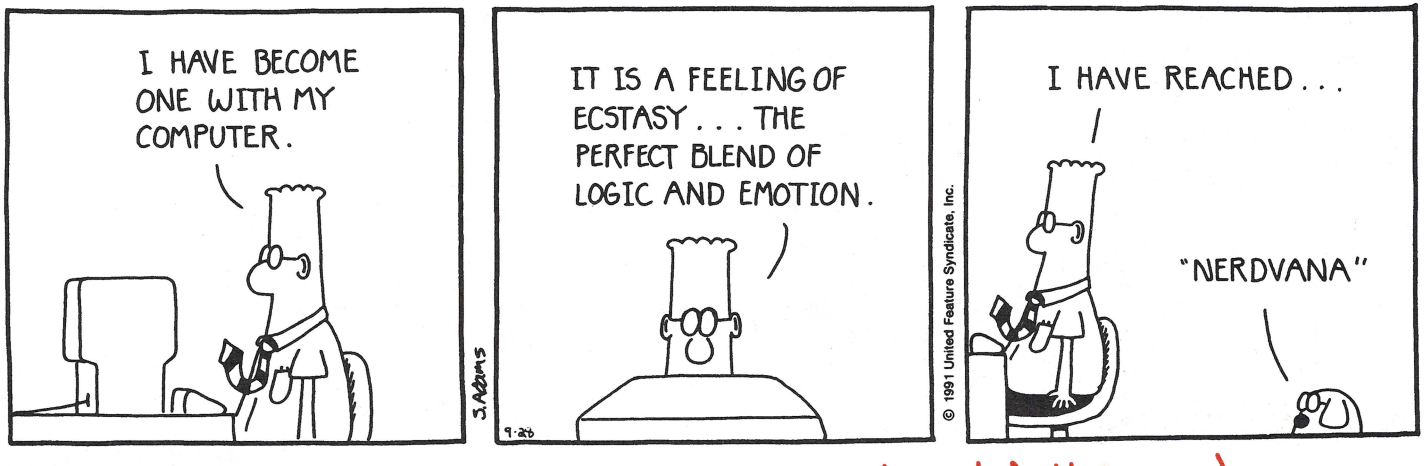
I have morning amnesia. I go through this whole routine every day.



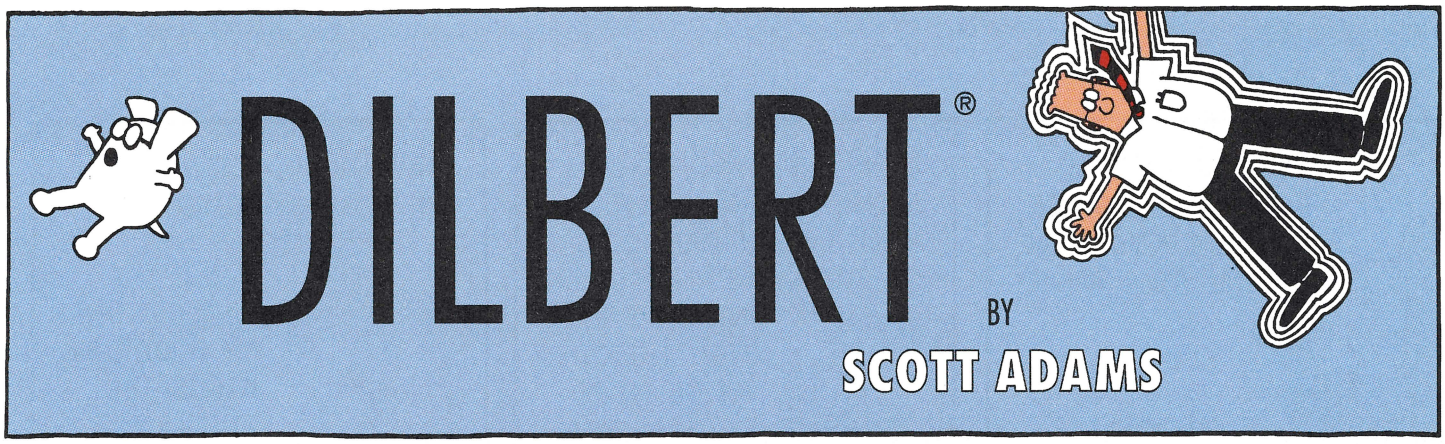
So many people asked why Dilbert's tie points up that I decided to answer the mystery...

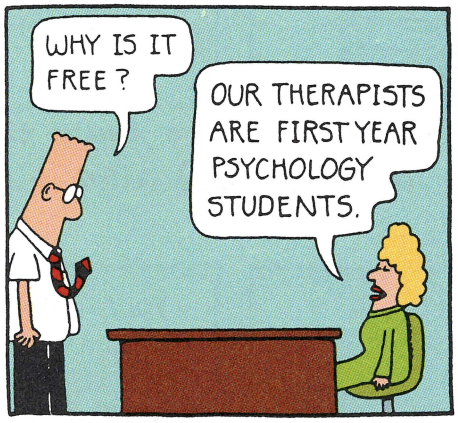


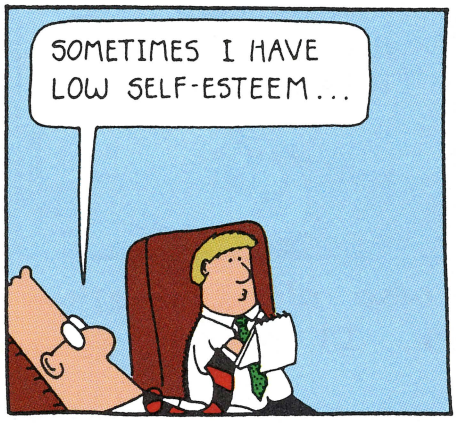
Then I realized I don't know why the tie points up myself. I left it a mystery.

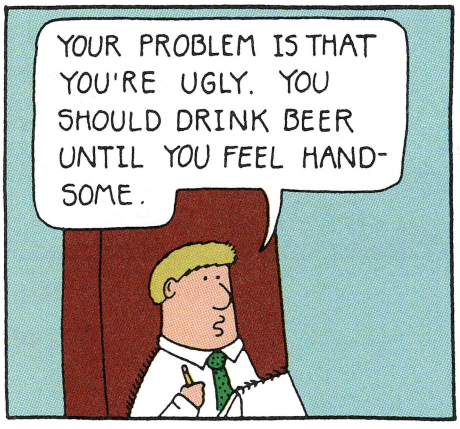


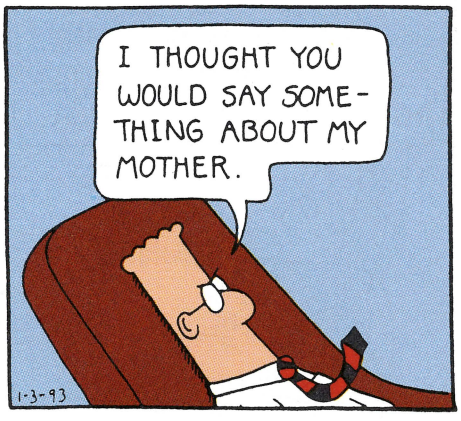
I invented the word "nerdvana" based on my own computer bliss.





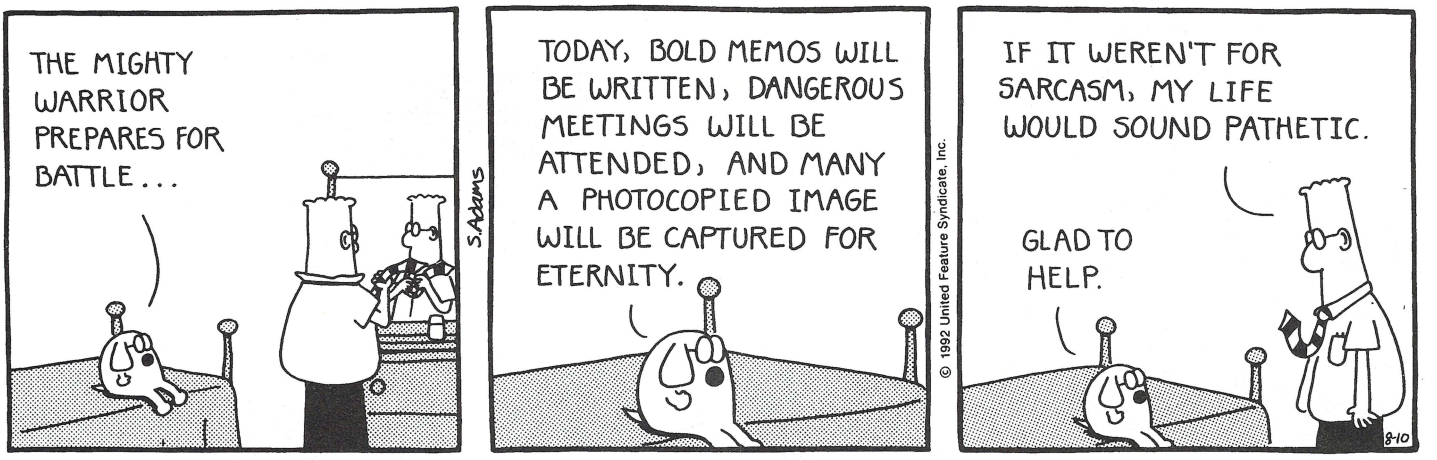






This was part of my early obsession with people who are bad at their jobs.

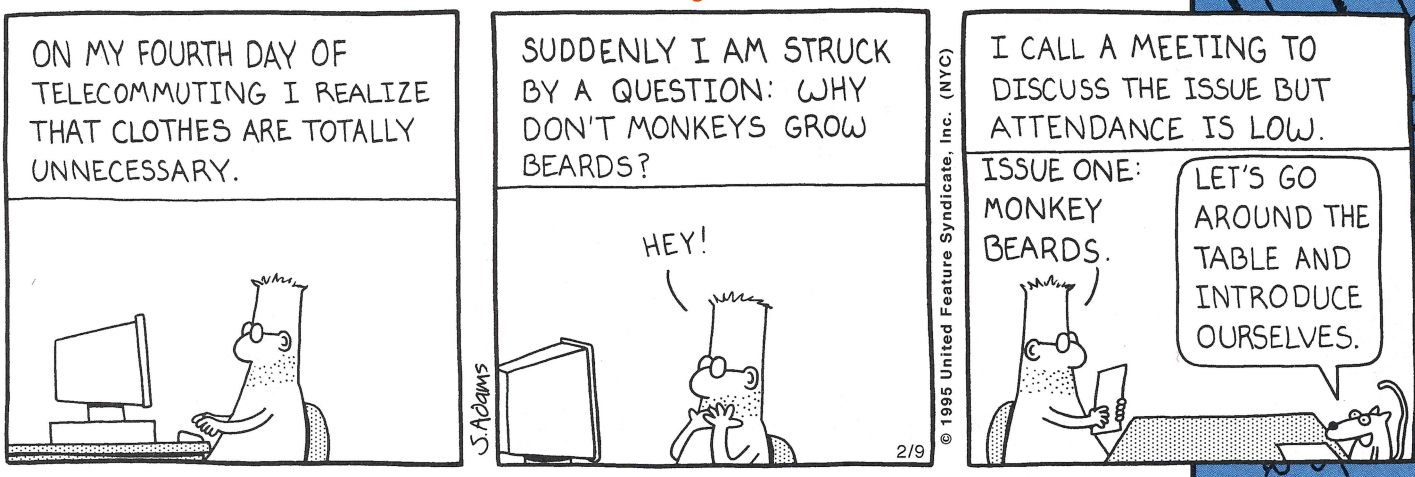
Dogbert allows me to have the conversations that happen in my head also happen in Dilbert's house.



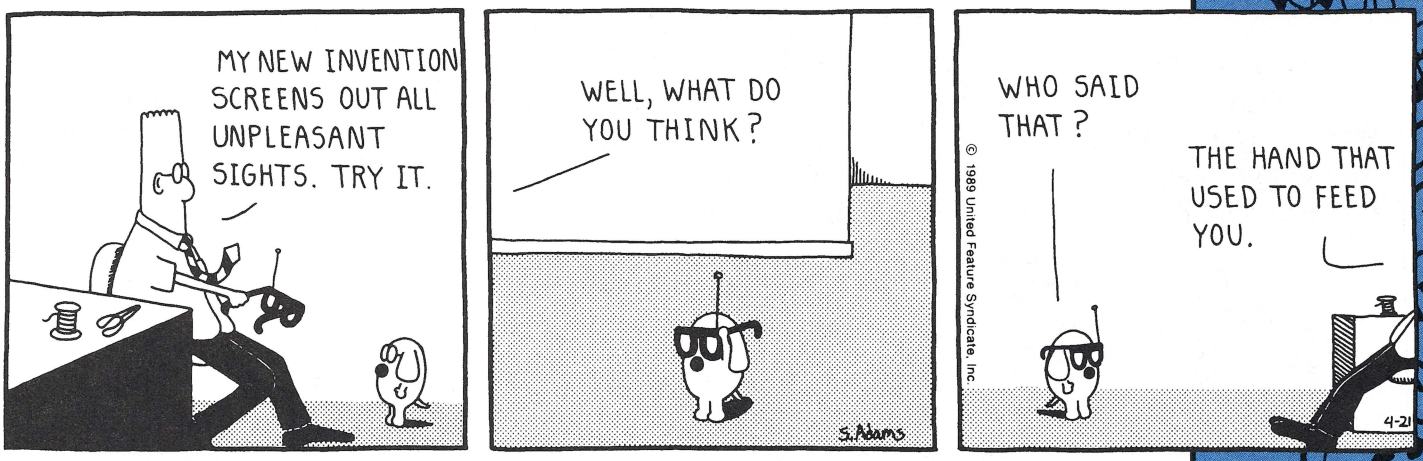
I had a boss who always talked in dangerous, war metaphors. It seemed so out of place.

Dogbert is the perfect character to answer any ethical question.

Why do beards stop at the neck? I spend a lot of time wondering that.

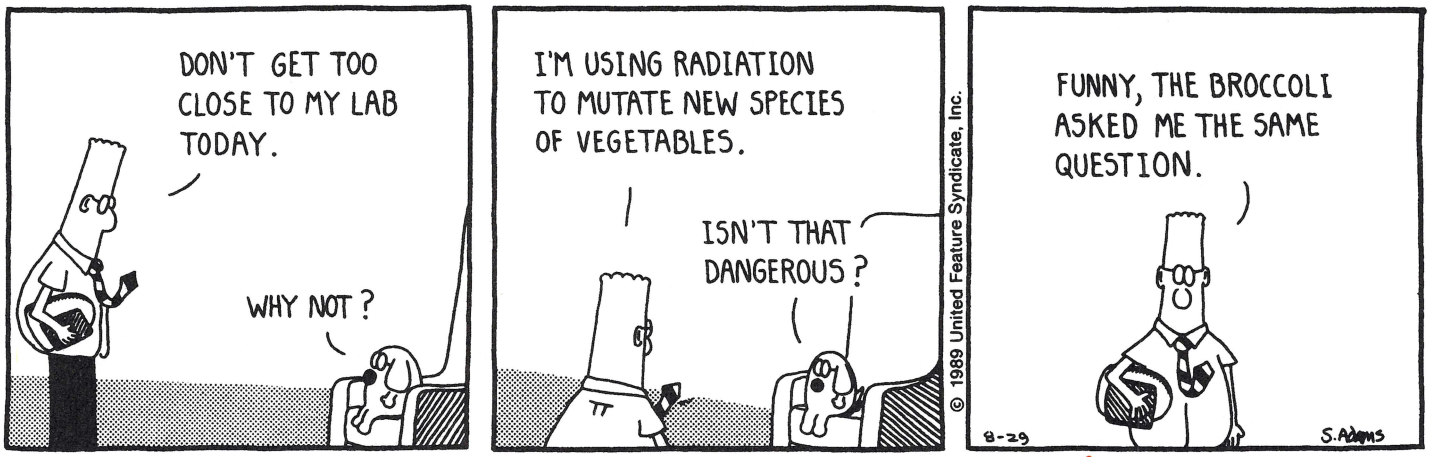


. . . and Technology



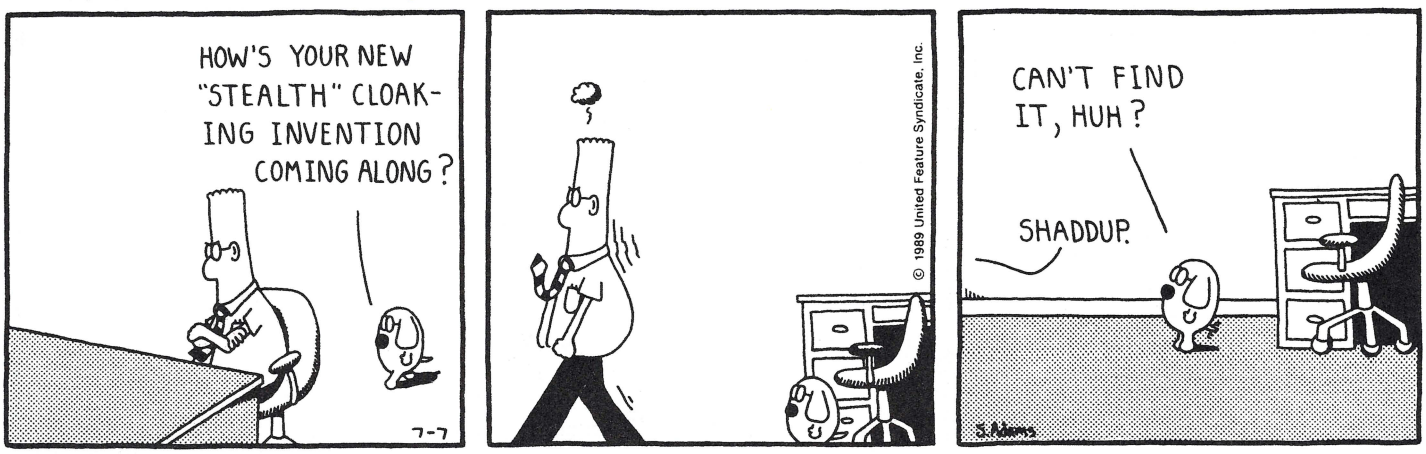
Every invention has a non-obvious down side.

↑ Loosely based on my lawyer, who hasn't sued me yet.

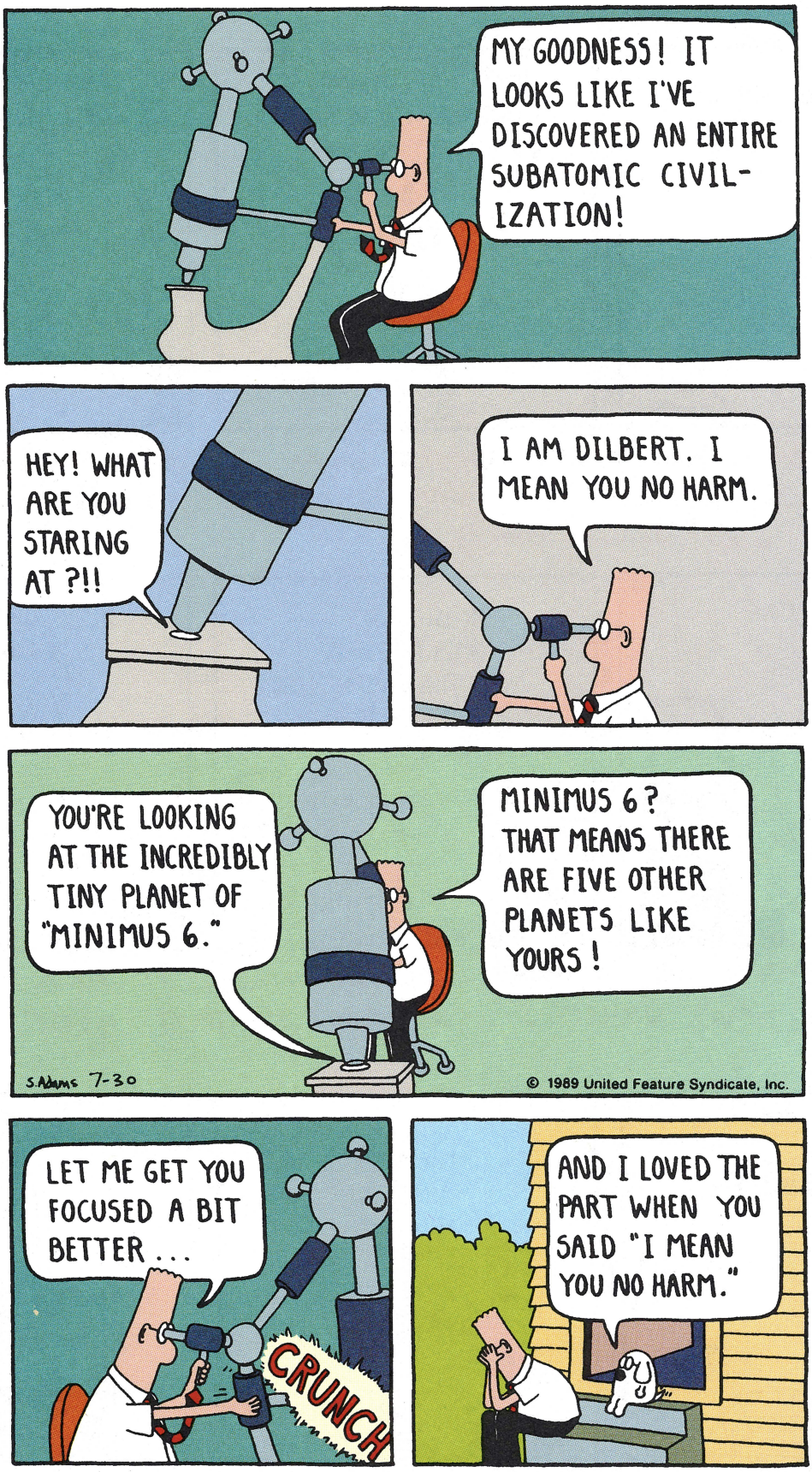


Broccoli is a funny word. Watch this: "Hey, there's a weasel eating my broccoli!" HA HA HA! . . . I kill me.

I was working in a high-tech research department when I wrote this. We would have been lucky to have that parsley invention.

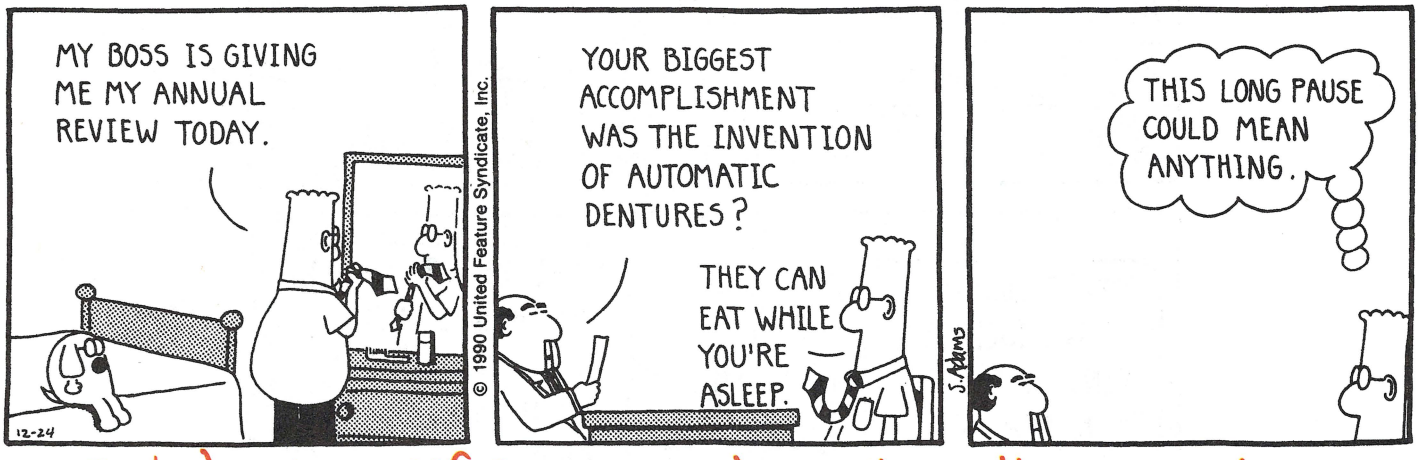


This is an old joke that I cleverly modernized by adding the word "stealth!"

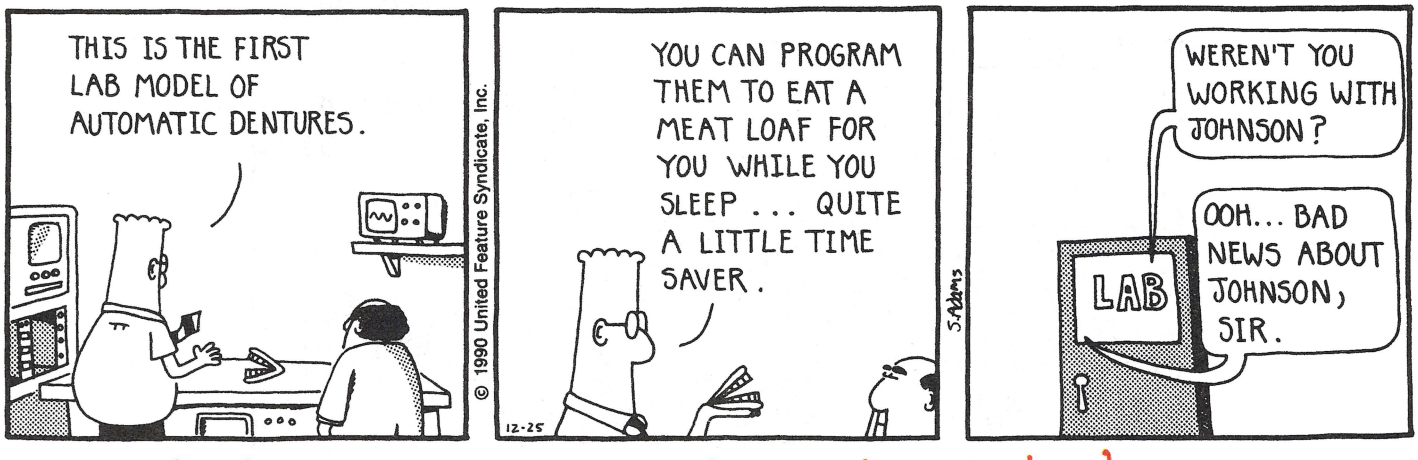


For some reason, I find this line very funny. I don't know why.

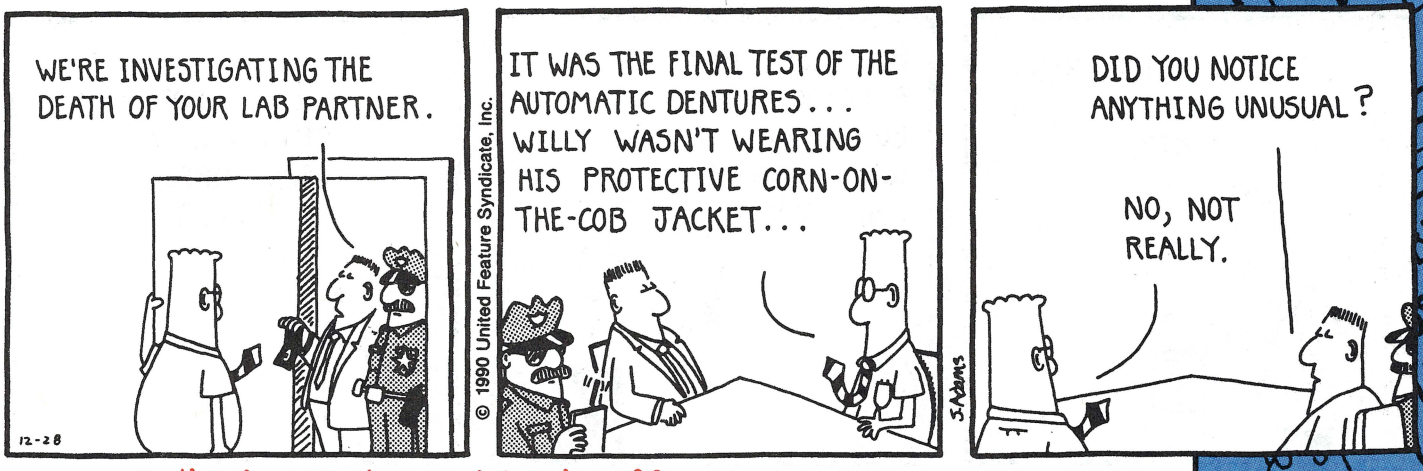
I'm often asked what happens when I can't think of anything funny. The fin joke is a good example. what the hell was I thinking?



I had many performance reviews where it was not obvious what value I had created that year.



I prefer jokes where the visuals are in your head, so I don't have to draw anything complicated. How do you draw a denture attack?

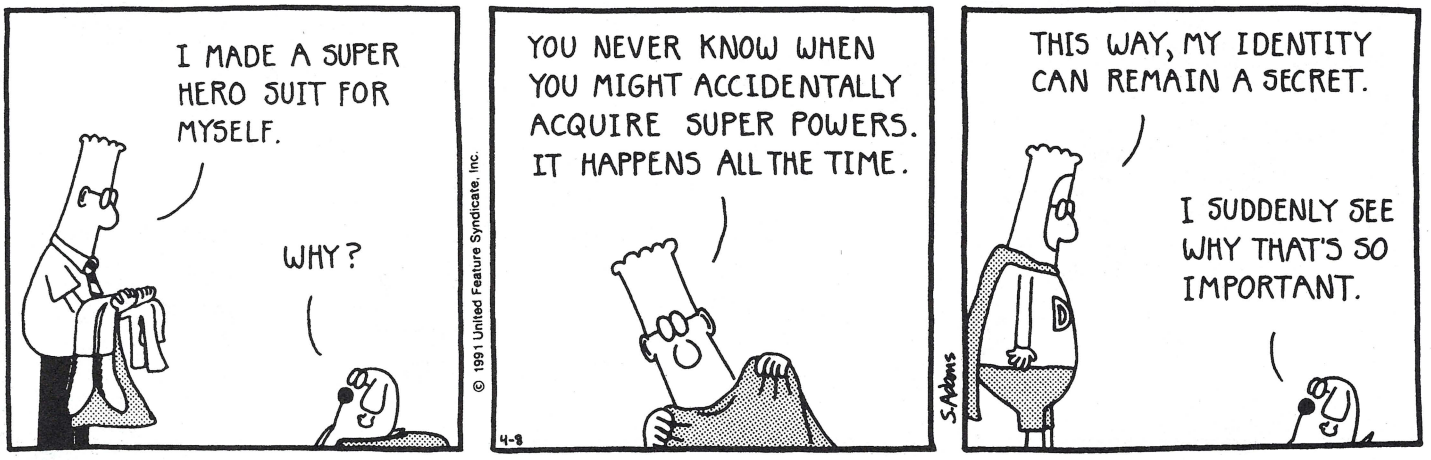


I think I have killed off more characters than any other cartoonist.

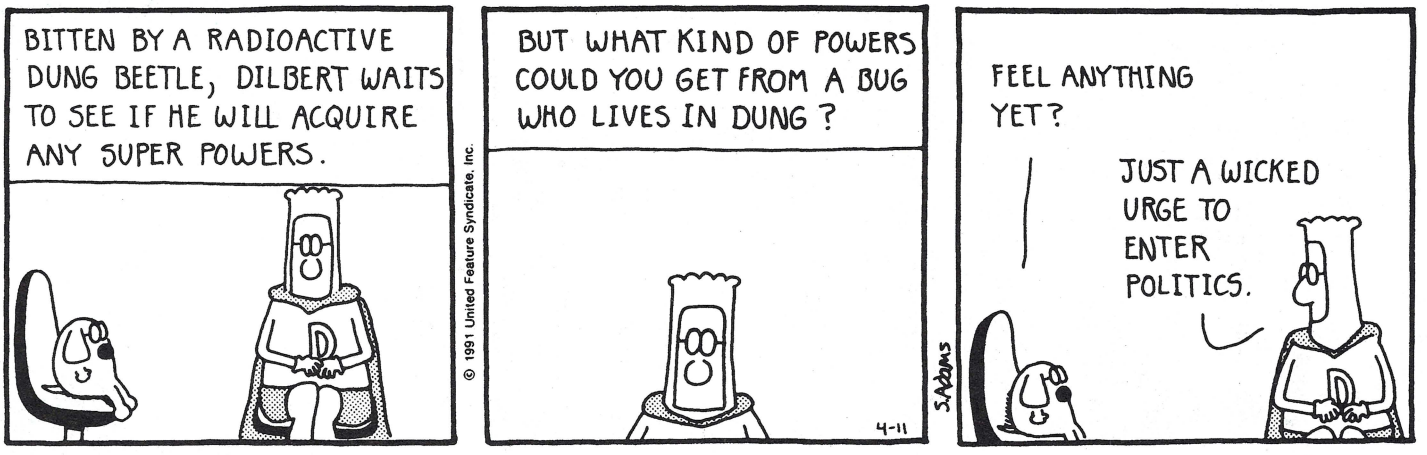
Have you ever wondered what makes something "news"?

I was sure my editor would put the boot on this cartoon, but she didn't.

I thought the android would become a regular, but he wasn't as interesting as I'd hoped.



Have you ever squinted to see if maybe you have x-ray vision. Admit it!

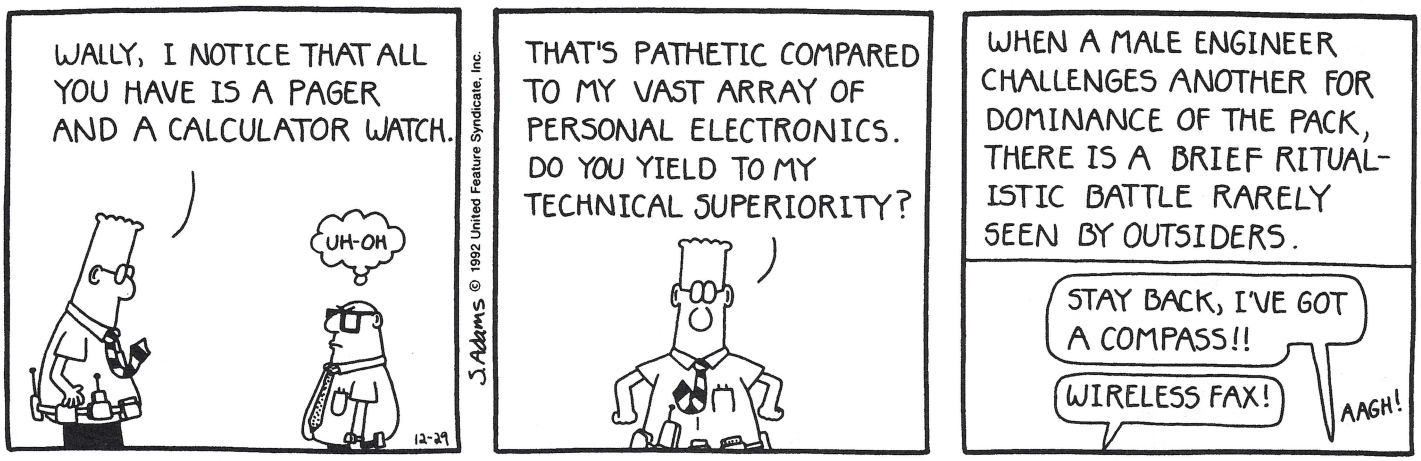


This is why I'm not a political cartoonist.

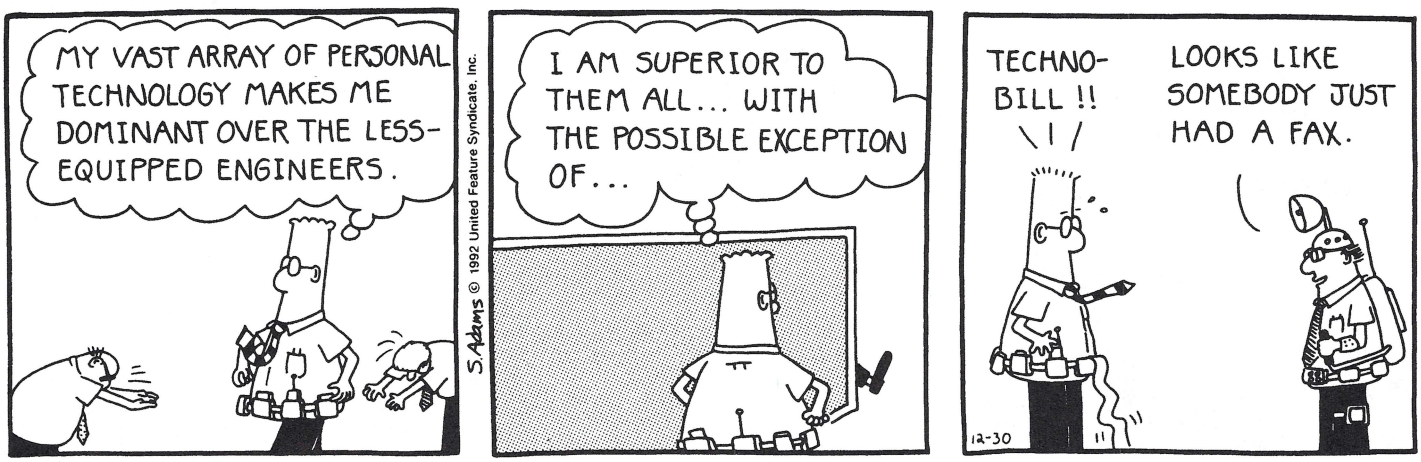
screwdrivers are the only tools I can draw.

Do I seem obsessed with hair?

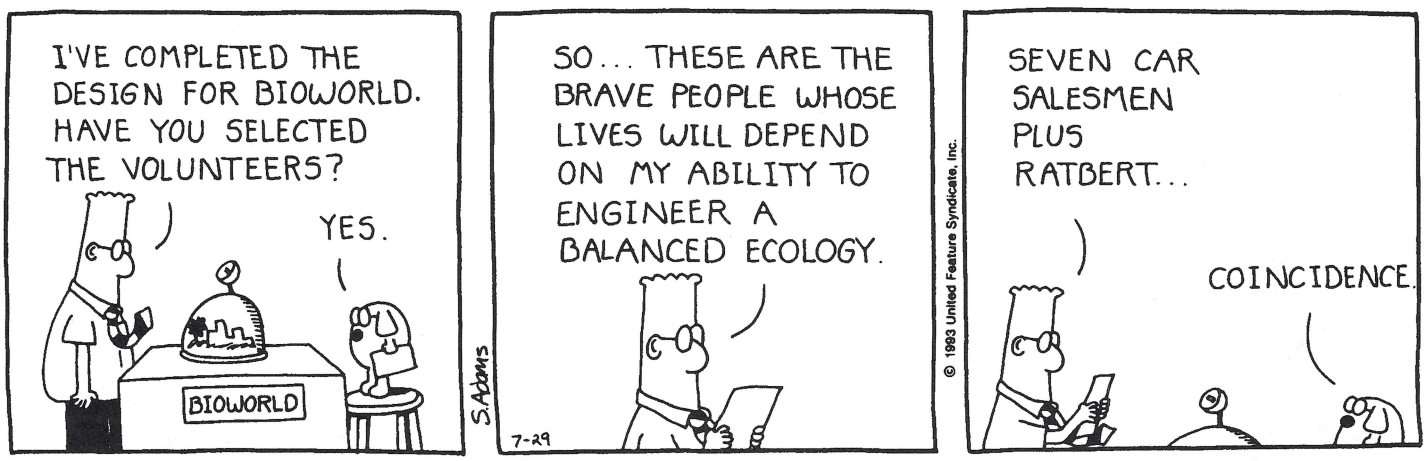
I actually have an Intel video phone now. I'm waiting for someone to call.



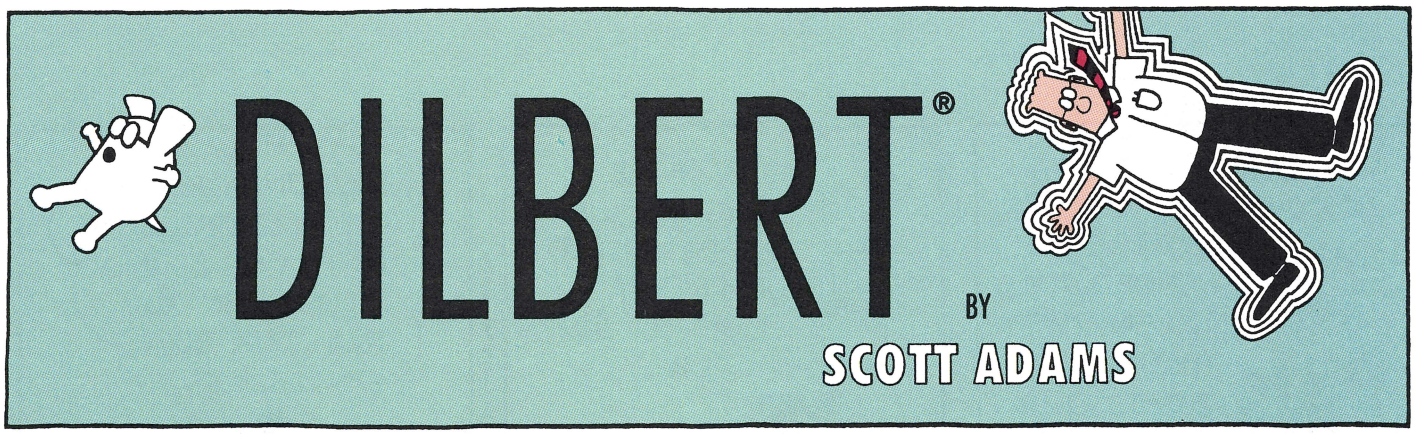
I had a calculator watch once. I replaced it with a watch that has a TV remote control built in (really).

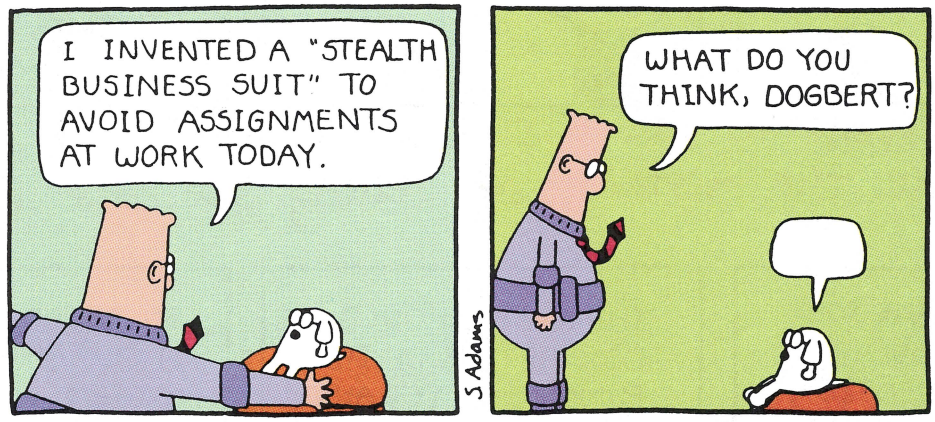


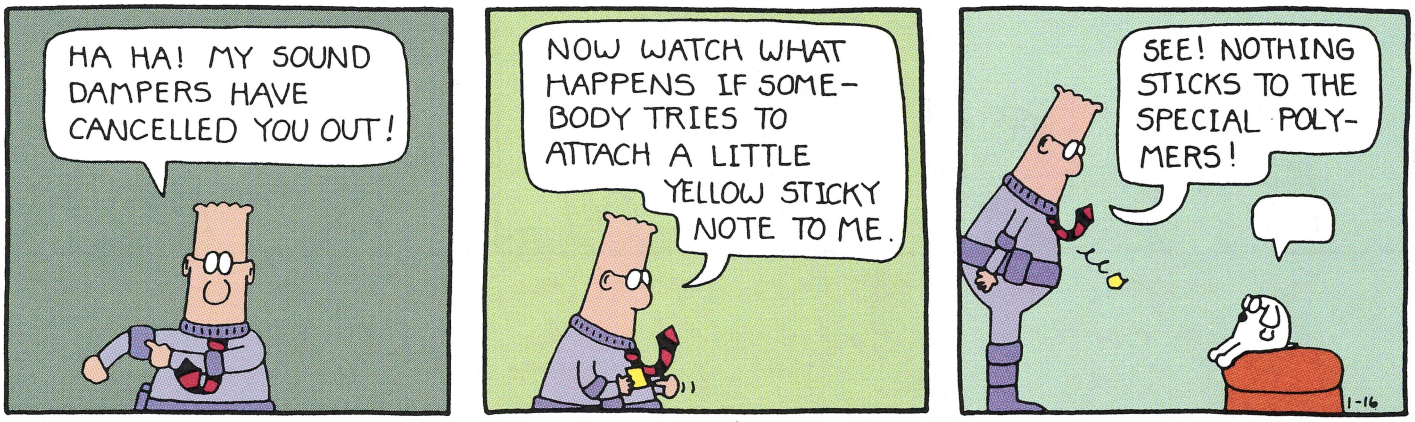
Techno-Bill is the most popular bit player I've ever introduced.



I'm an open-minded guy, but I do hate car salesmen. Does it show?







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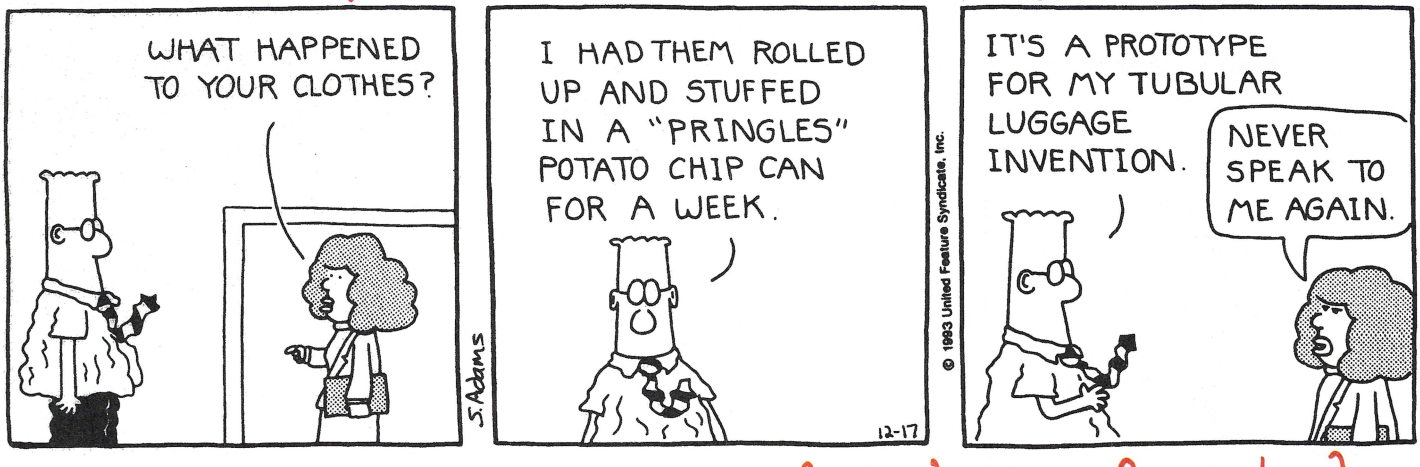
I think I know some people who own these suits already.

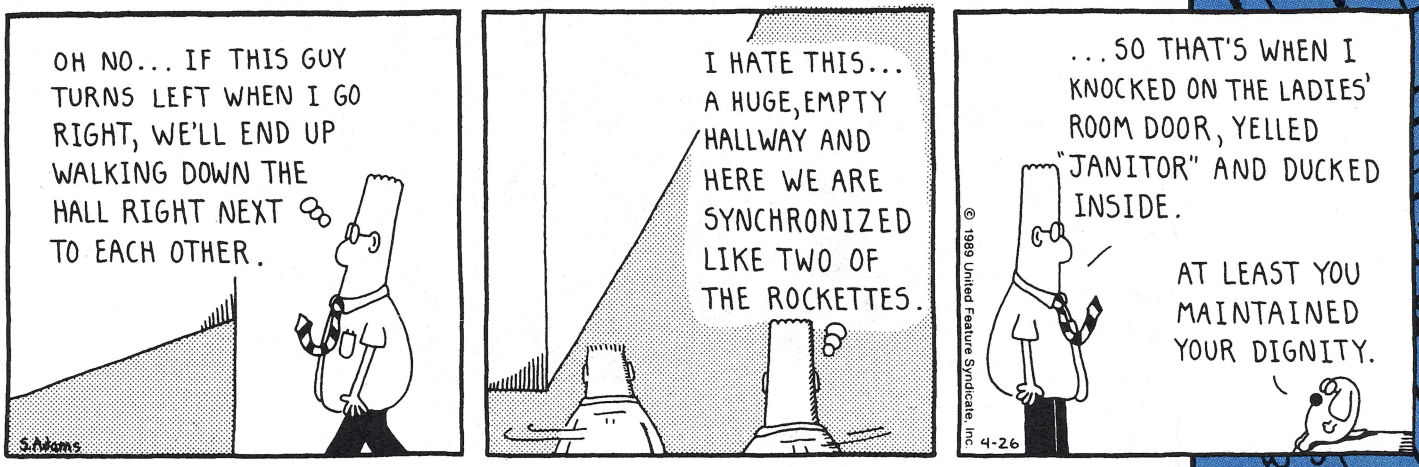
This happens to me – I have a great idea and then I make the mistake of telling someone else.

You might laugh at this invention, but I'm told that service people roll their clothes to prevent wrinkles when they pack. It could work! Try it at home.



A good name for a band would be "Tubular Luggage!"

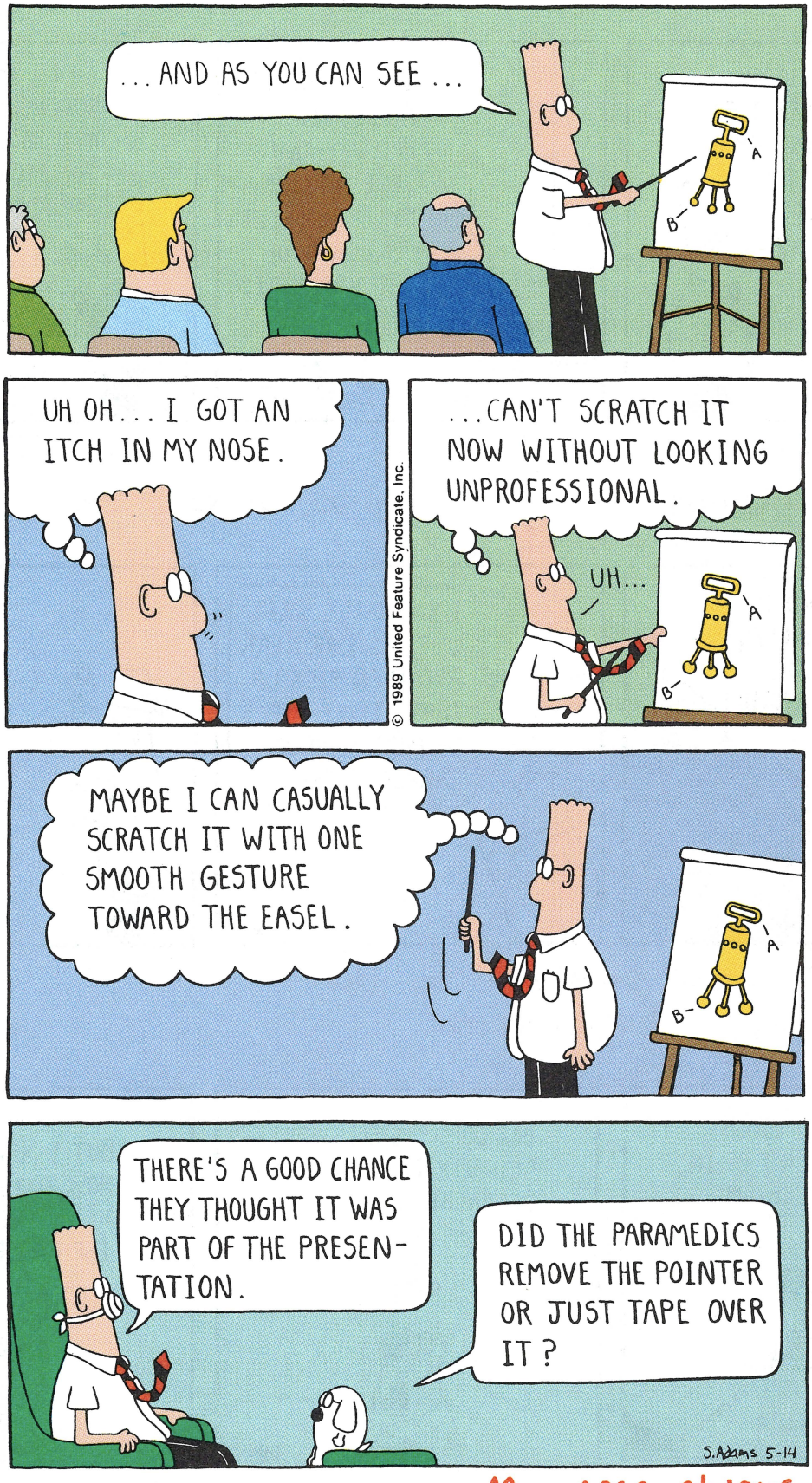
. . . in the Business World



I never know what to do in hallways. There's no graceful solution for shy people like me.

I saw someone do the carpet fuzz trick.

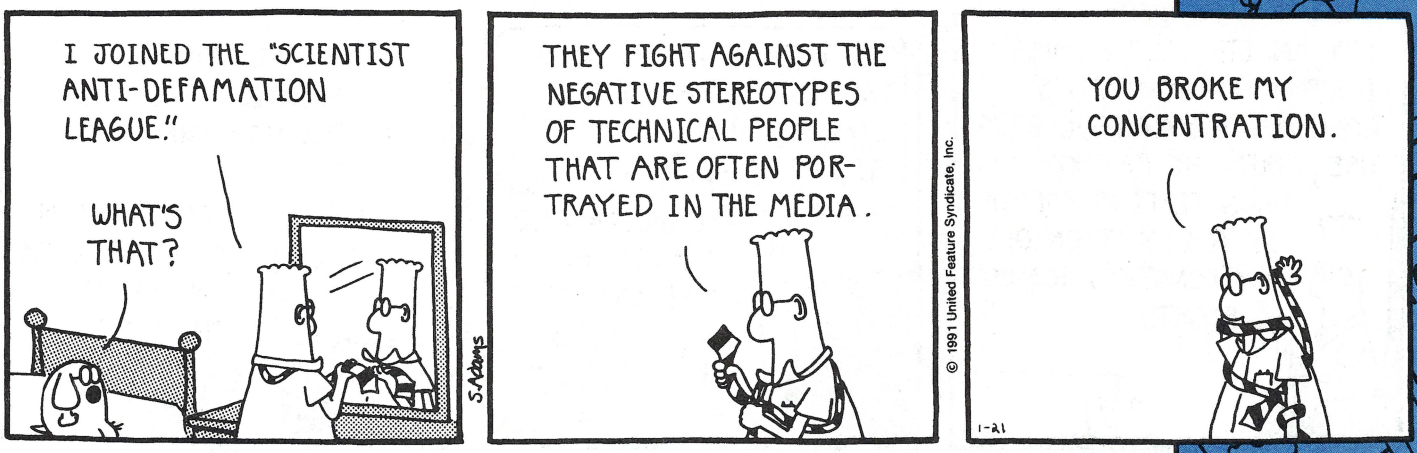
The best sickness excuse is, "You don't want to know the details."



My nose always itches when I speak in public.

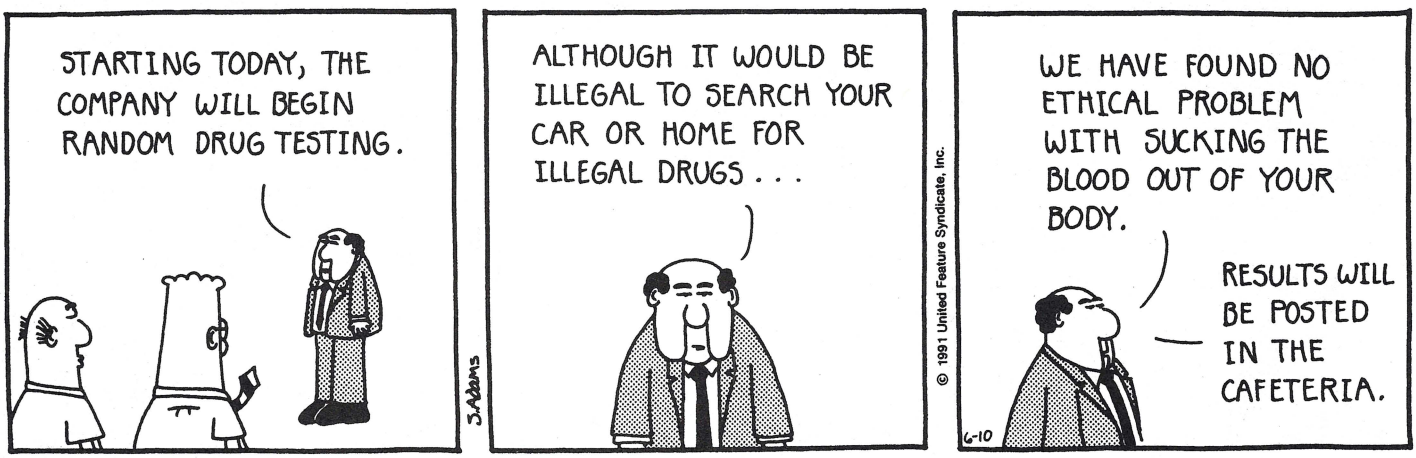
In California, we fear people from New York City.

I worked with this secretary.

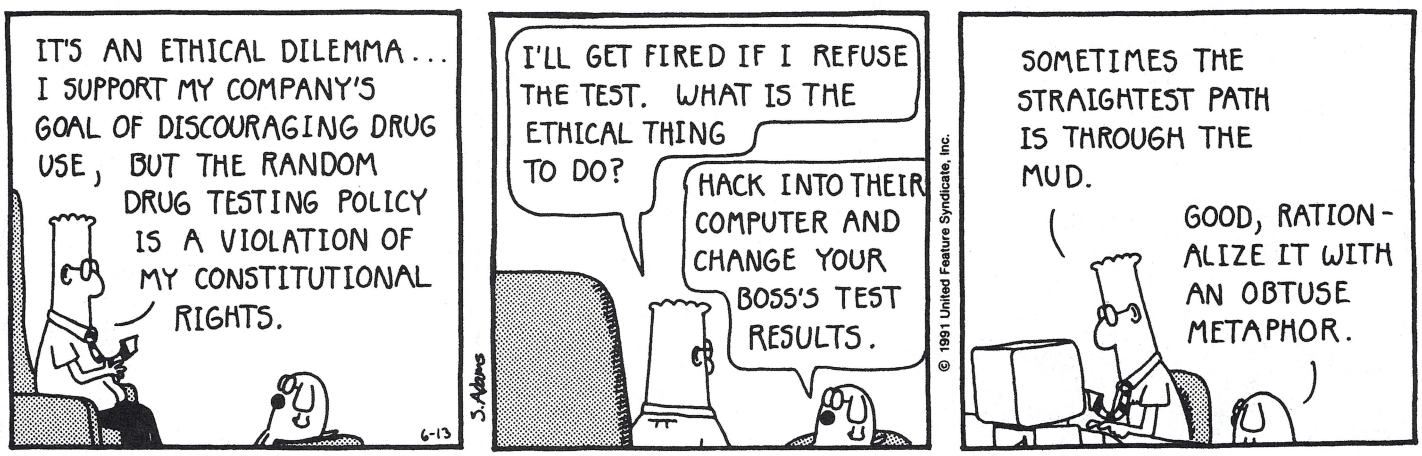


I did this cartoon after getting a complaint letter from a scientist.

I'm not smart enough to be a scientist, so I make my living by mocking them.

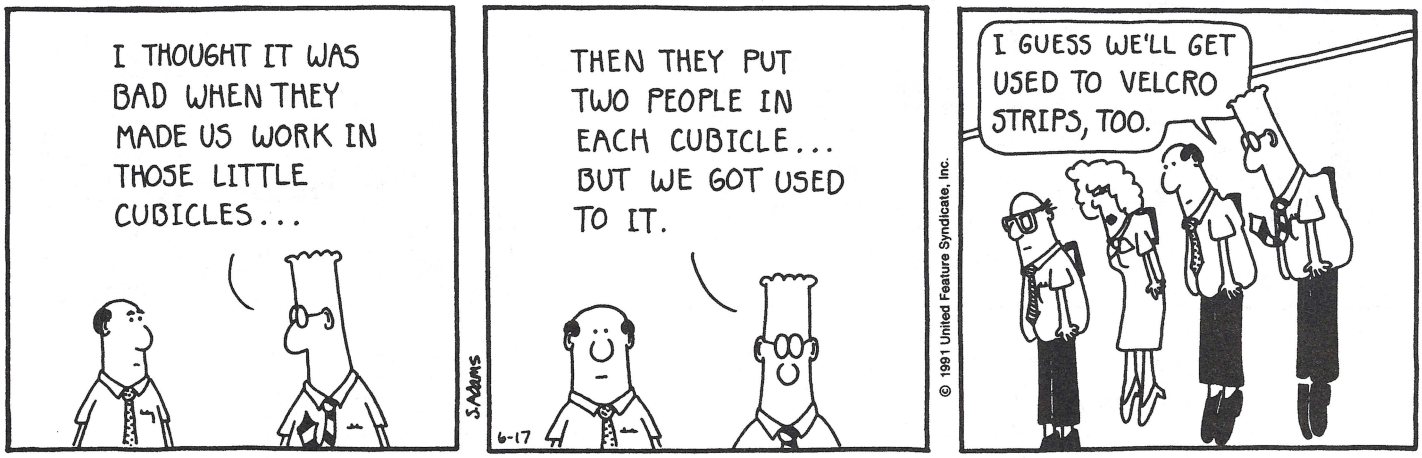


I'm amazed that this is legal in the USA.

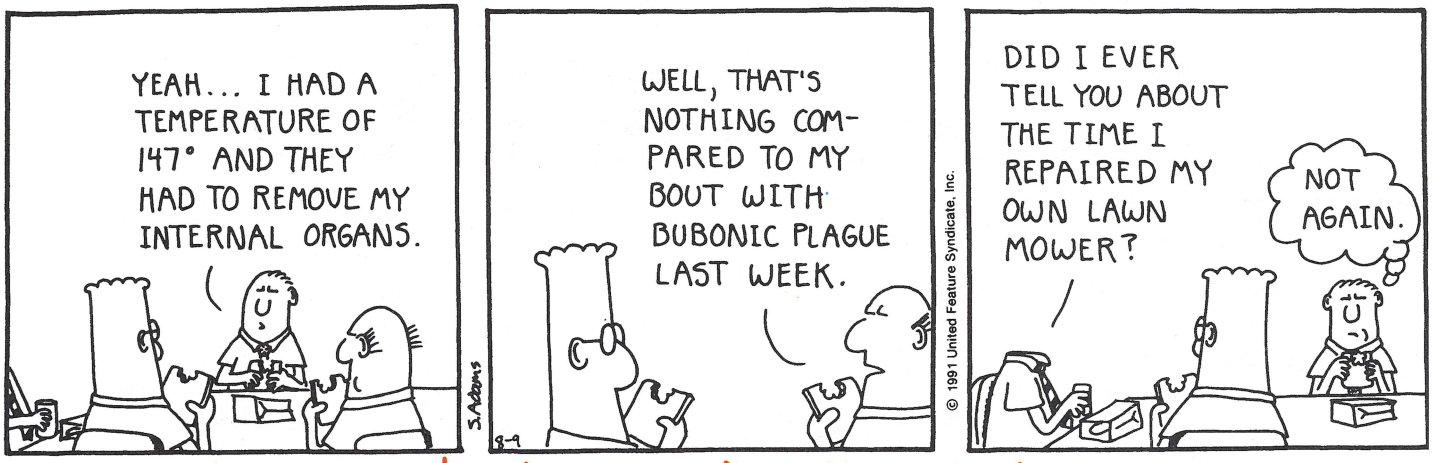


A good metaphor can make any bad idea sound good.

This cartoon is based on the most evil executive I ever met. He actually mocked people this way.



I should have put "Velcro" in quotes because it's a trademark. oops.

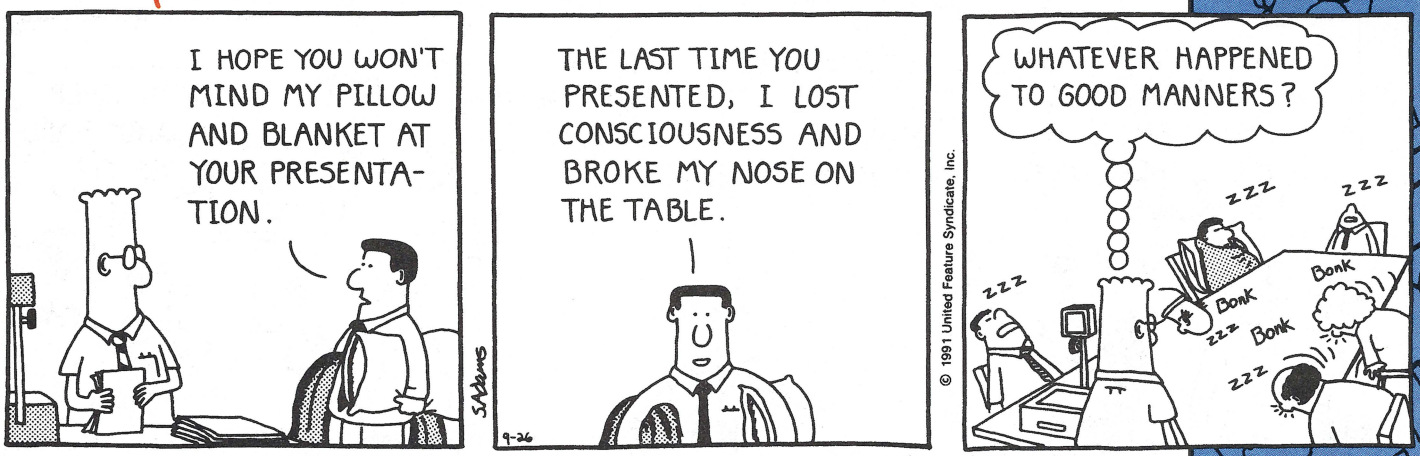


When I ate lunch with the engineers at Pacific Bell, the one-upping continued until the food was all gone.

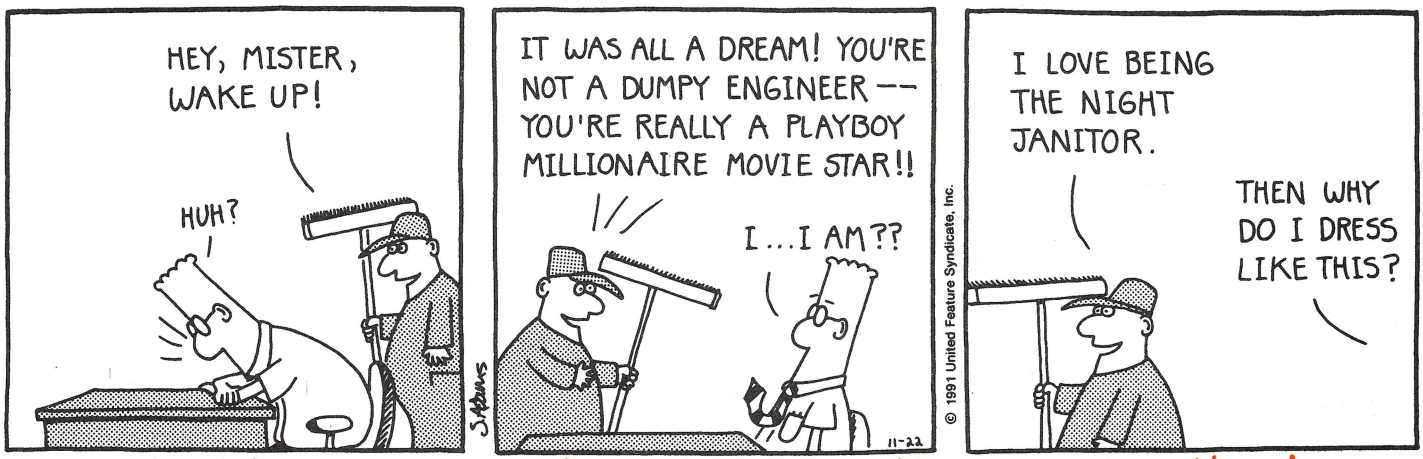
The more I exaggerate a character, the more he's familiar. It's strange.

Yes, I did get complaints from the vertically challenged.

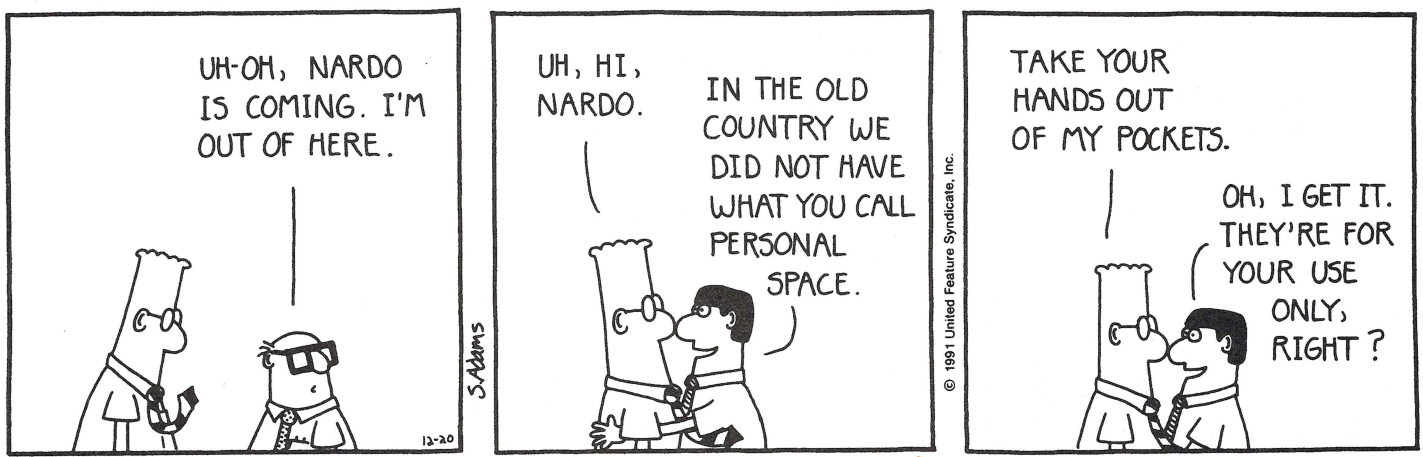
This is perhaps the weirdest character I've ever created. He's based on a particular co-worker I once had.



I've known people who could sleep during meetings with no sense of shame. I envy them.



Sleeping at work is a common theme in Dilbert. I used to sleep in my cubicle all the time.



I was raised in the country, where touching means you're standing on the same carpet. Any closer and you're engaged.

Empowerment might be the all-time dumbest idea, at least when it's over-applied.

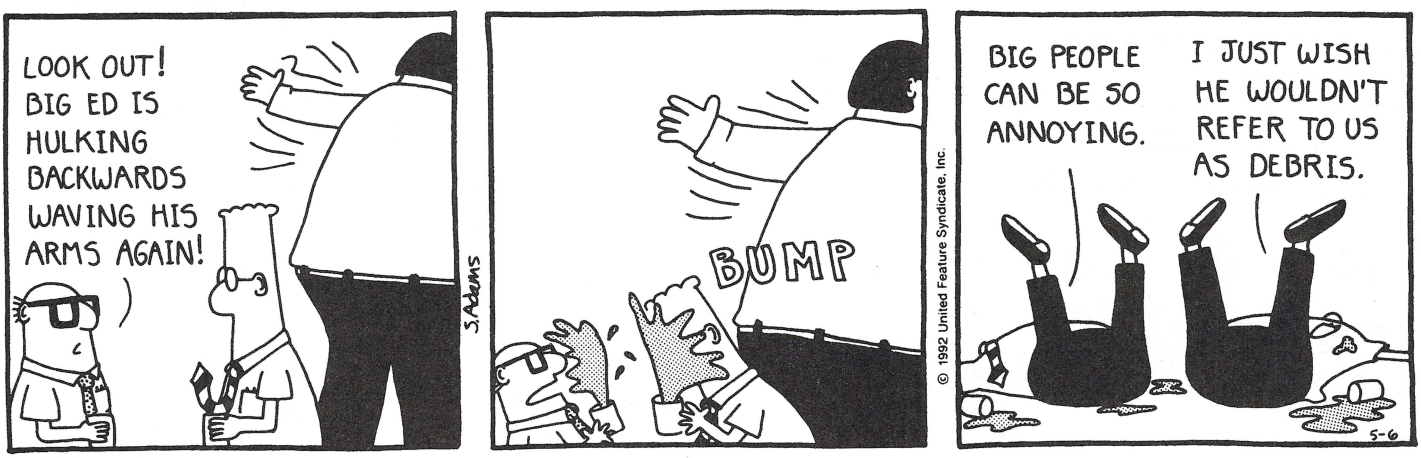
when I worked in Engineering, the marketing department was our evil nemesis.

It always seemed like Marketing had all of the party people.

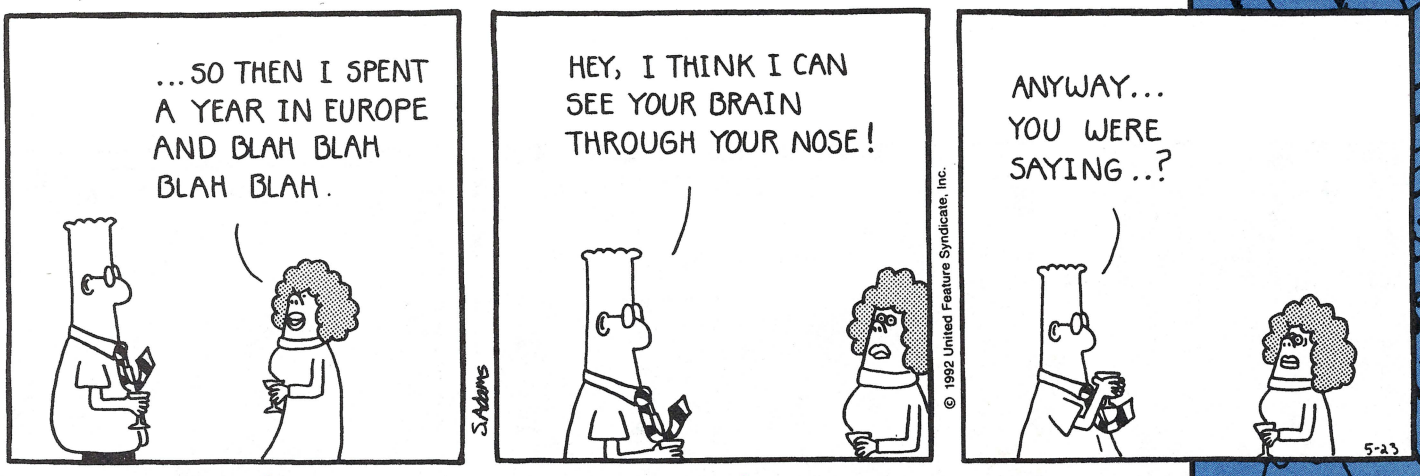
I got complaints from unicorn lovers.

This joke was written by a reader as part of a fill-in-the-punchline contest. So don't blame me.

Some of my Pacific Bell co-workers longed for jobs where they would never be noticed.

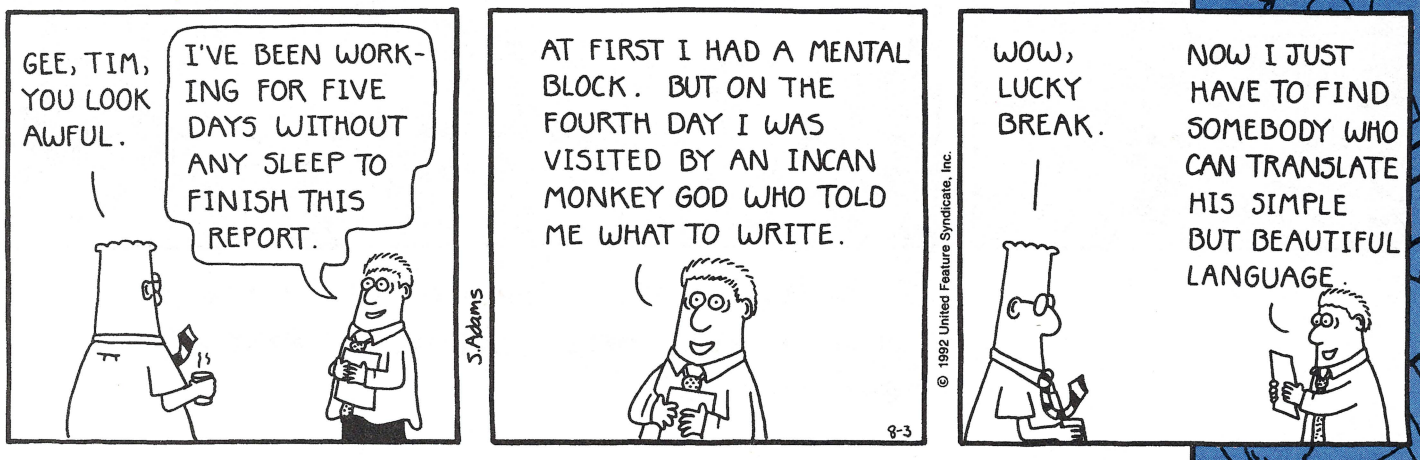


I'm 5'8" and it bugs me when big oafs don't look where they're going.

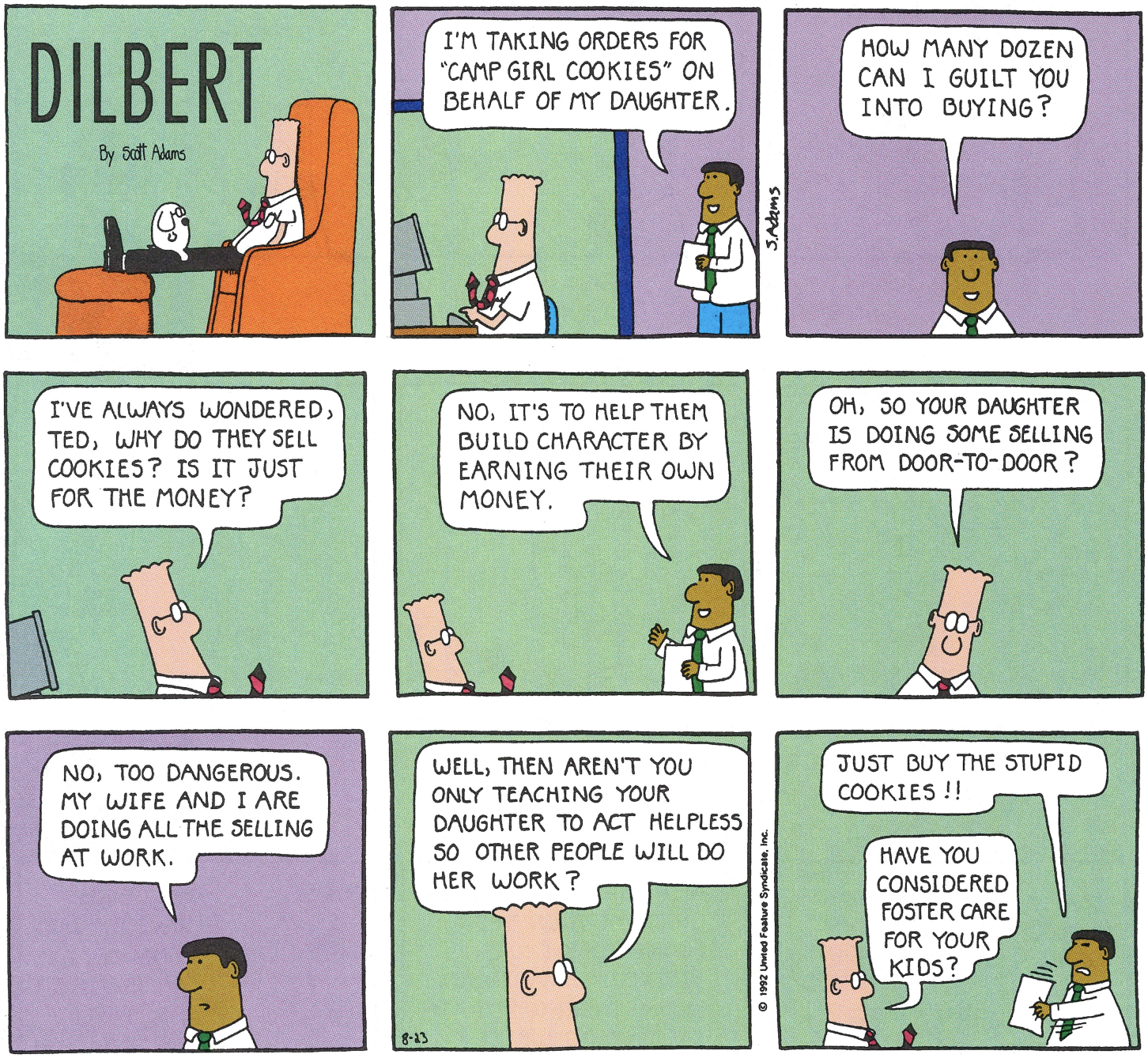


I always say the wrong thing, usually because I'm bored.

I was part of a "Quality" initiative where the only tangible change was to our notepads.



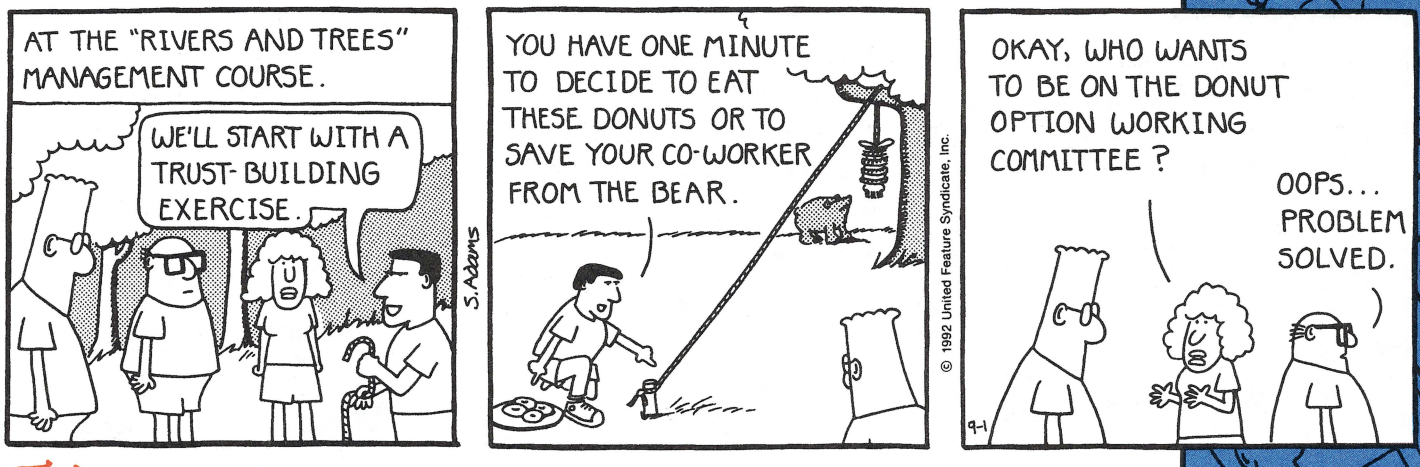
I had a co-worker who didn't realize how much the quality of her output was influenced by sleep deprivation.



I have to say "Camp Girl" instead of using a real organization's name. We fear them.

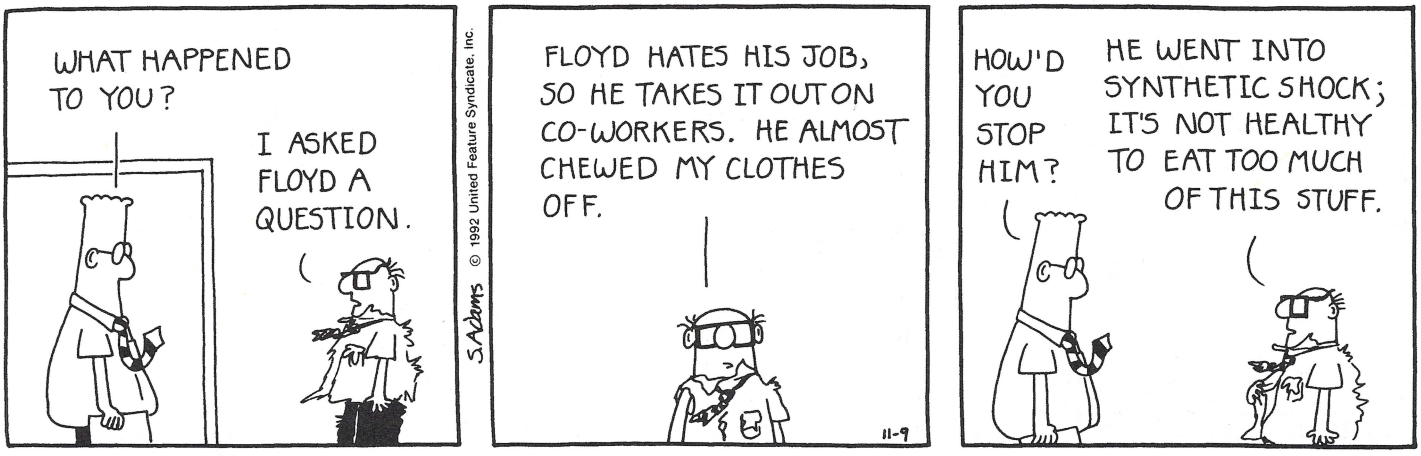
I spent most of my career in corporate America suffering from door envy.

I relished the small revenges.

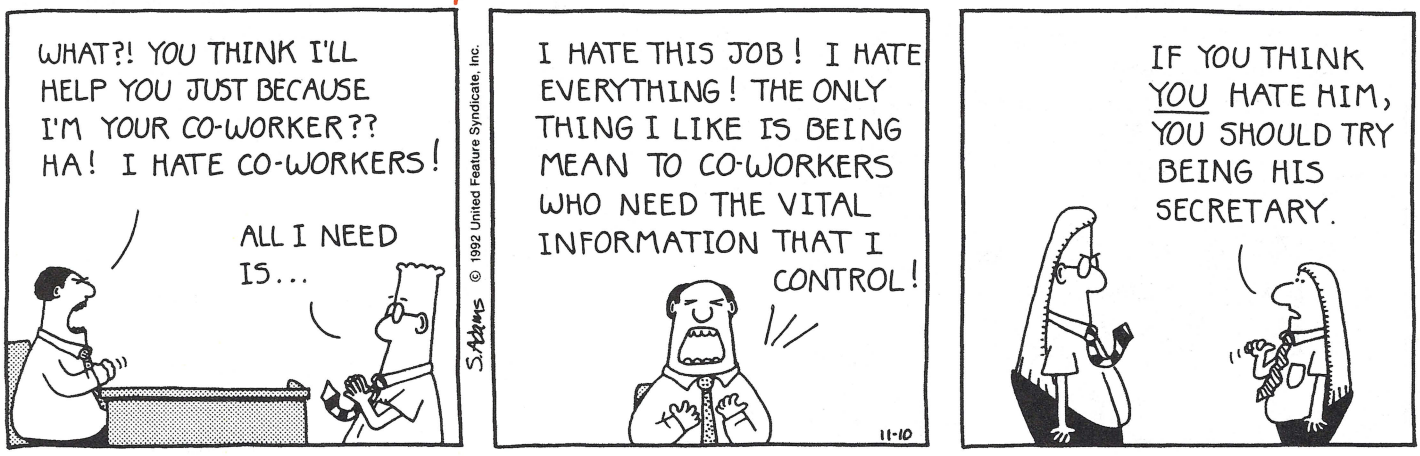


This was inspired by my own tragic experiences at "team building."

It's hard to draw mud!



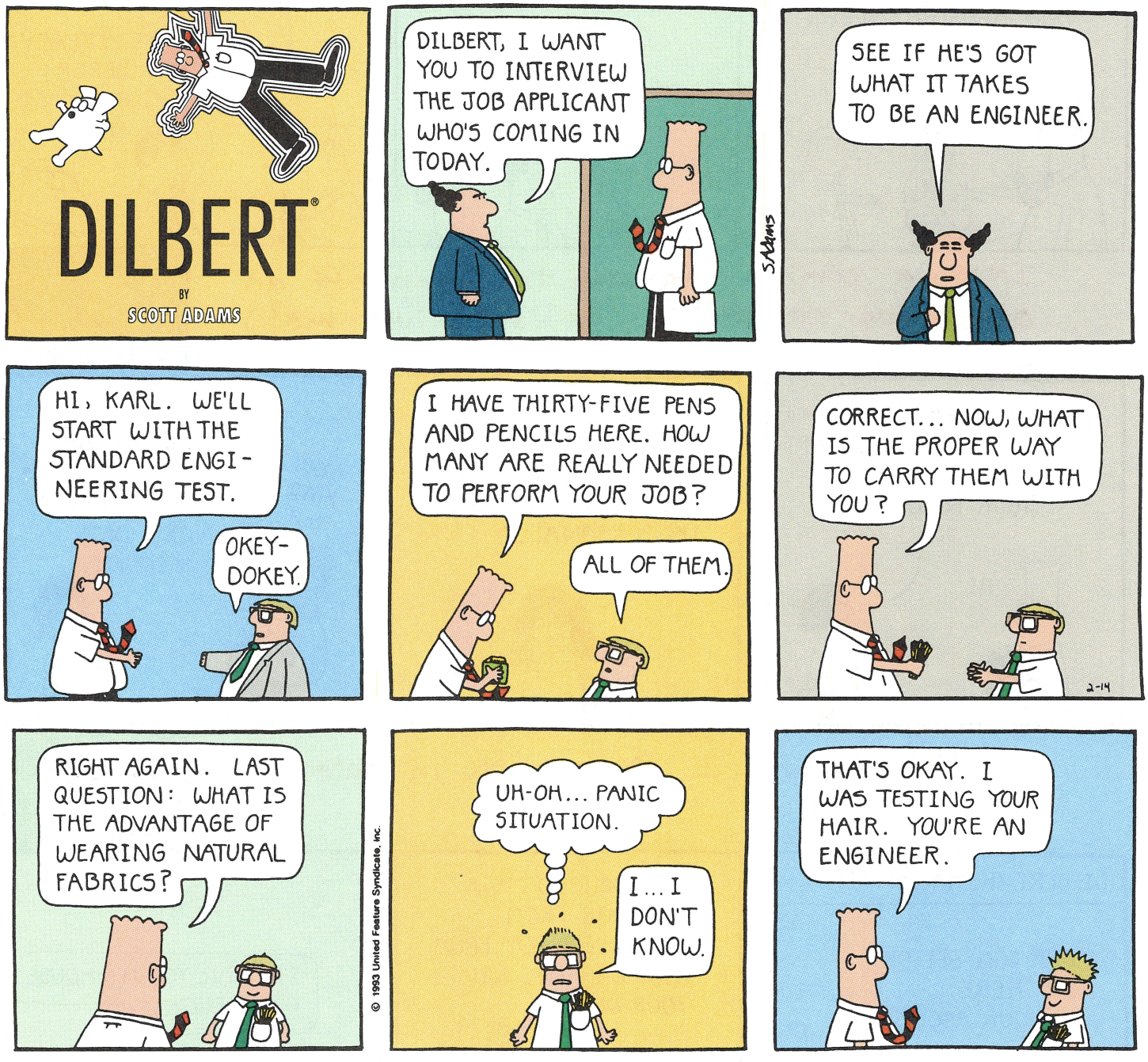
I favor the death penalty for any co-worker who intentionally causes discomfort.



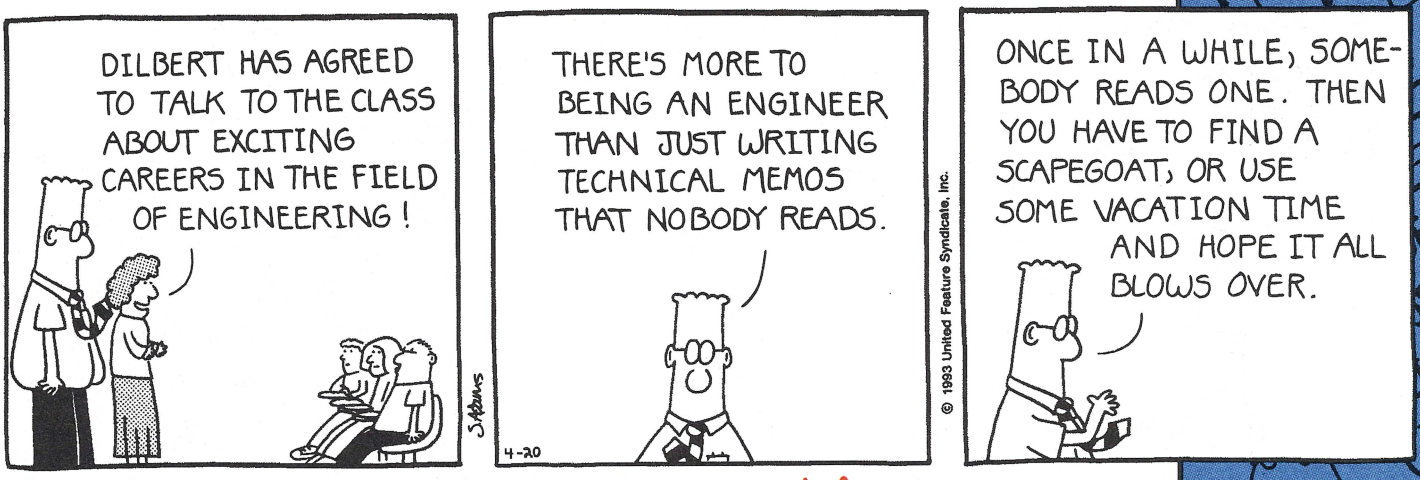
In every job, there was always one of these guys.

It's a common fantasy to bump off an obnoxious co-worker. (or is it just me?)

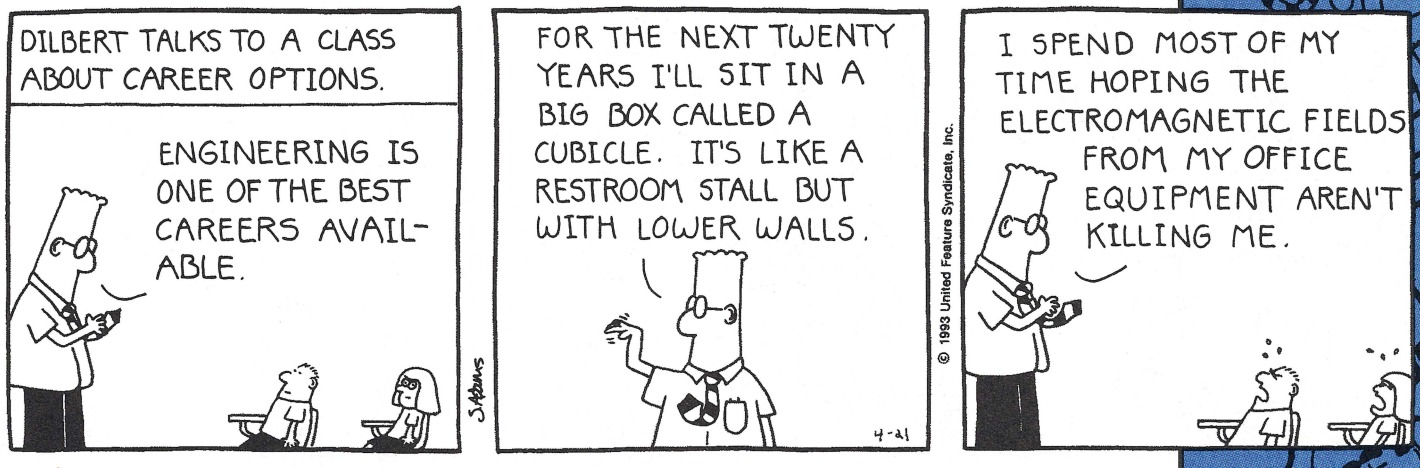
This is why I don't work in sales.



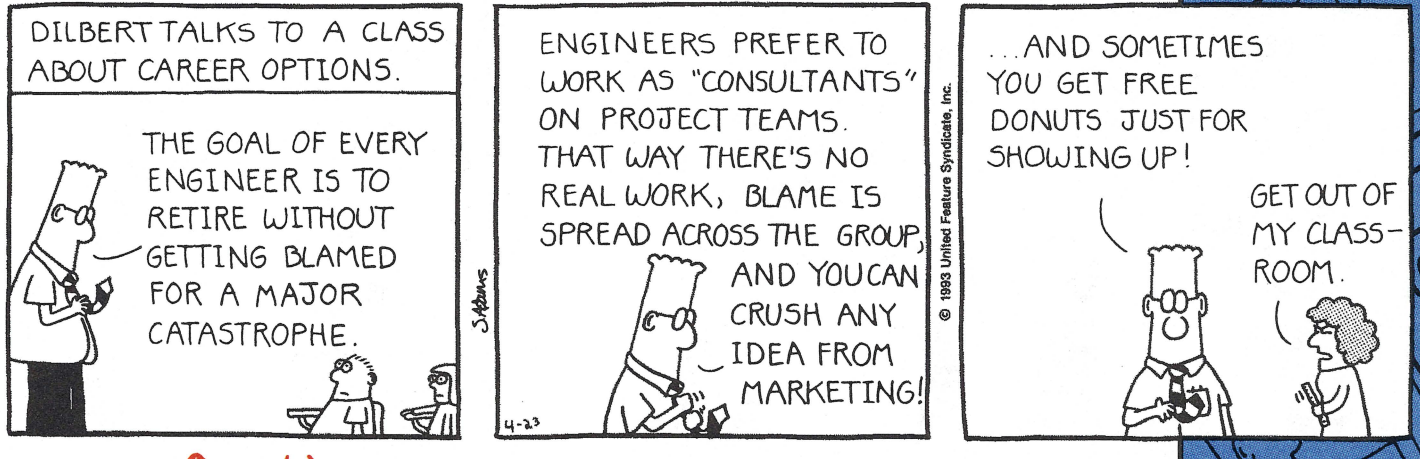
I used to quiz engineers about why they carry so many writing tools at once. As far as I can tell, it's so they'll have emergency backups.



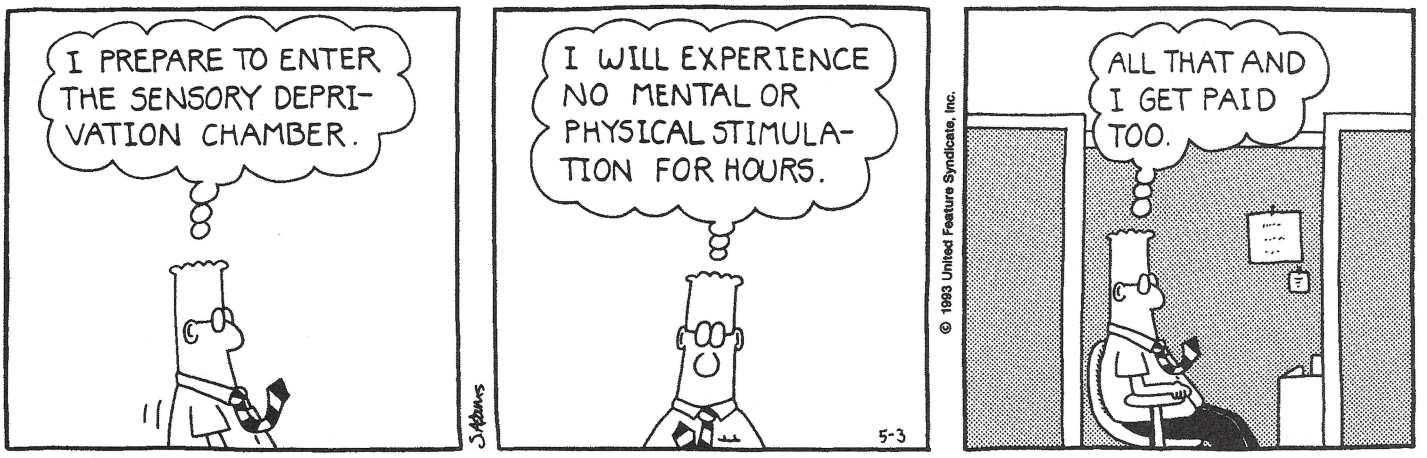
I never knew what an engineer did for a living when I was a kid. I still don't.



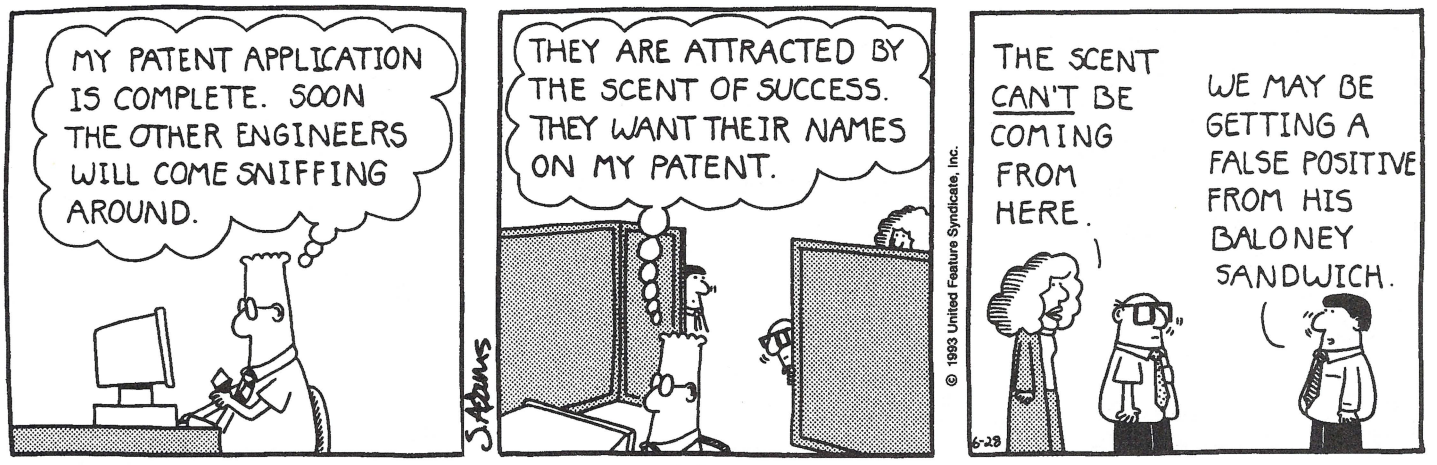
It's a good thing that nobody tells kids what work is really like.



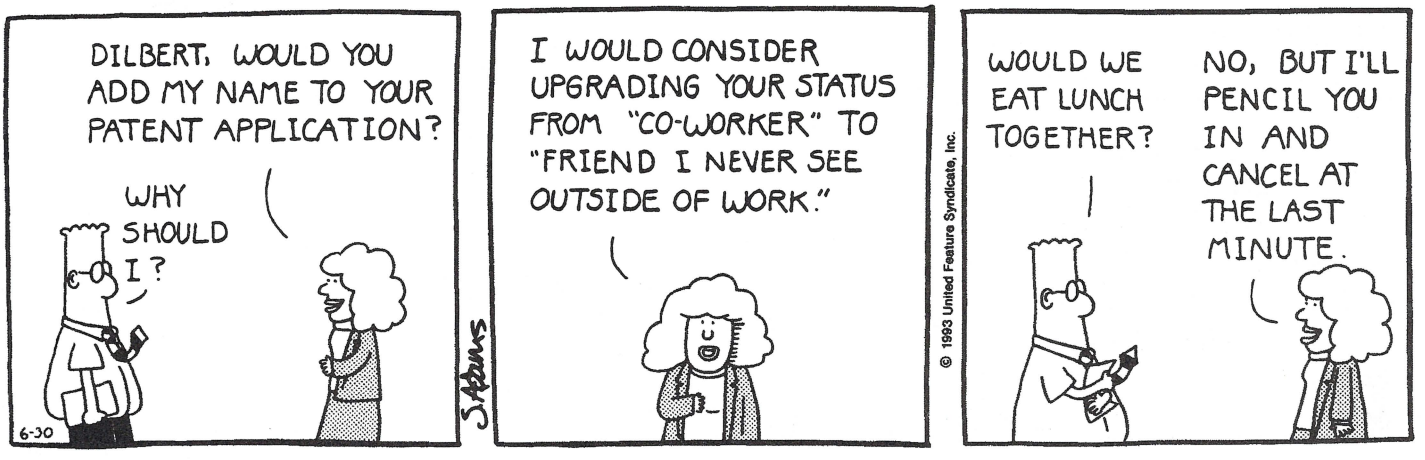
This is more truth than exaggeration.



The guy in the cubicle across the hall from me coined the phrase "sensory deprivation chamber" for his cubicle. I liked it.



You say bologna, I say baloney.



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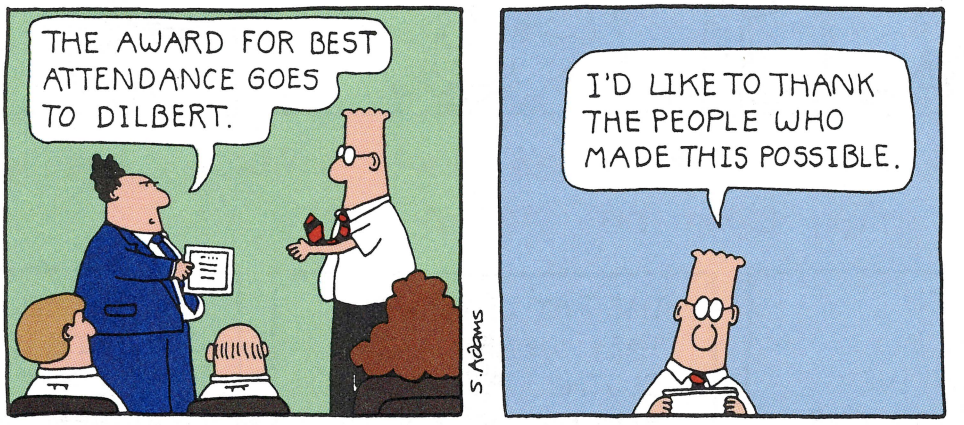
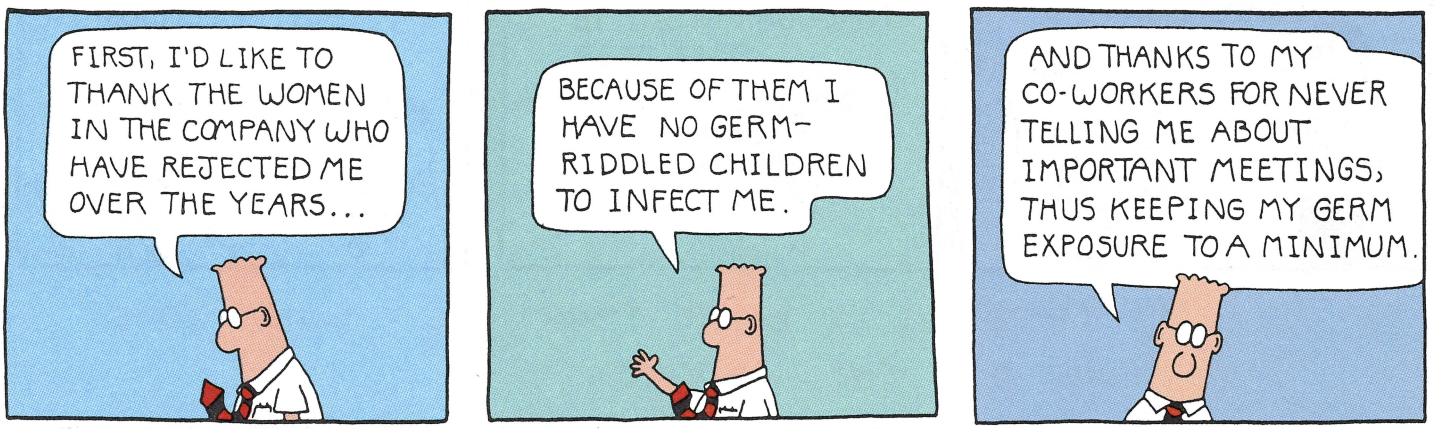
SCOTT ADAMS





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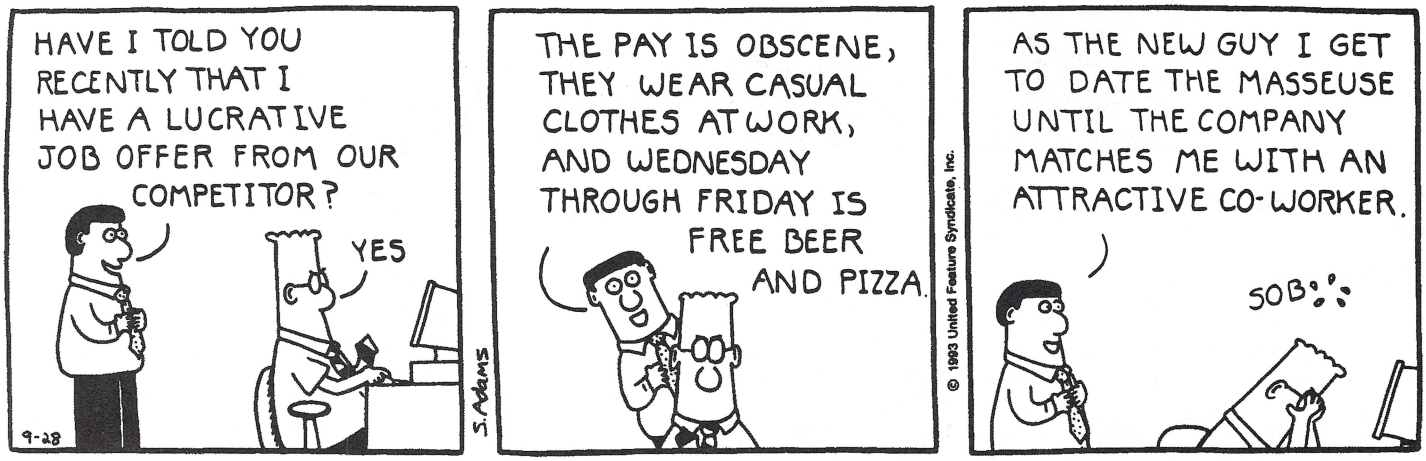
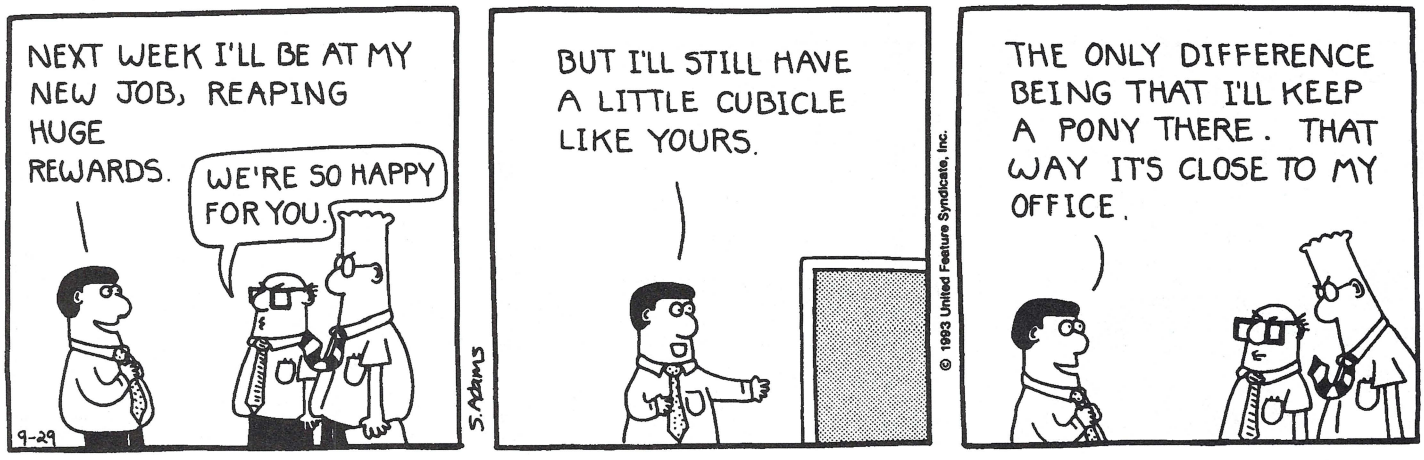
I like the phrase "germ-riddled children."

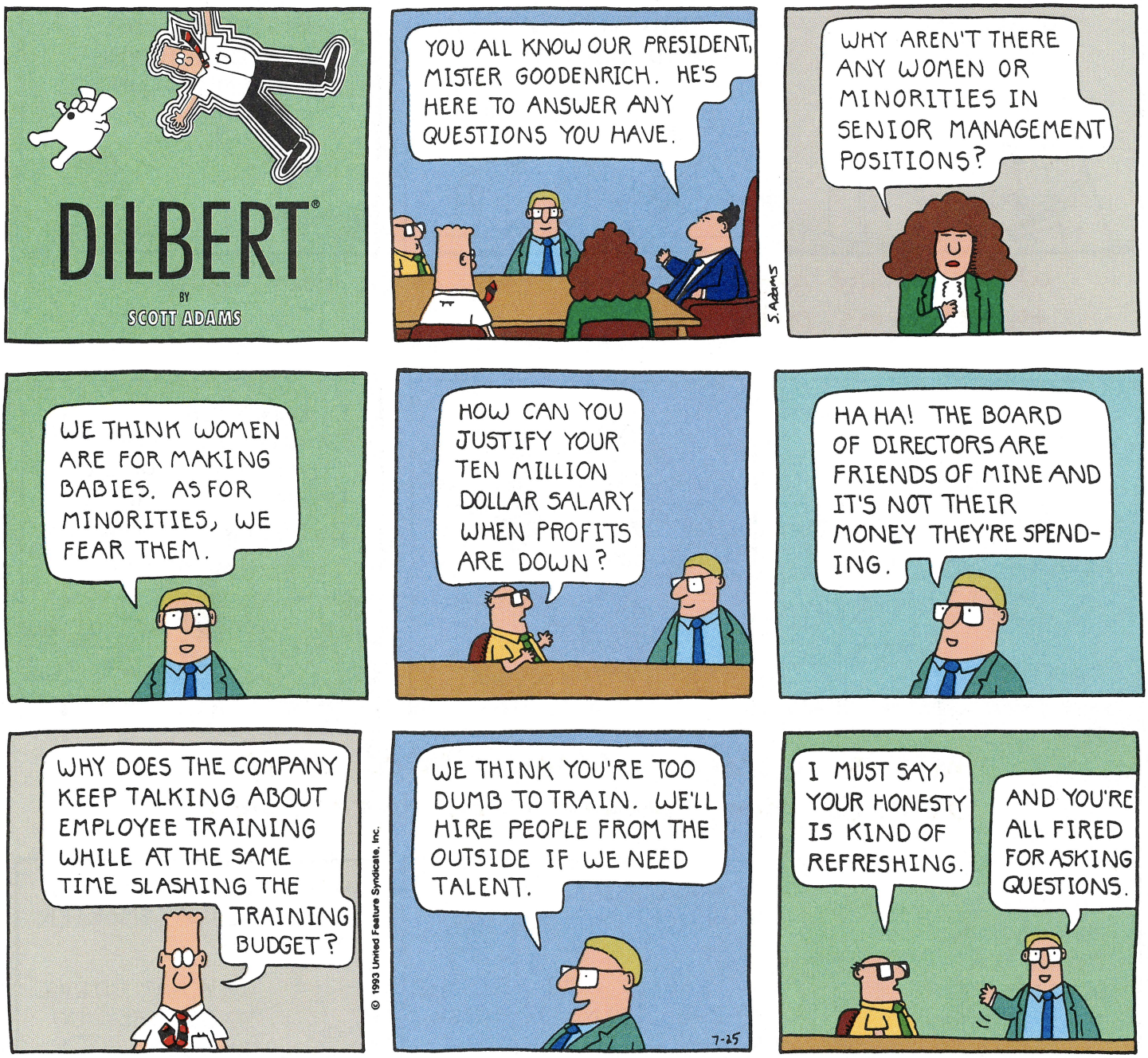
Yes, I know there's no such thing as the Vulcan death grip, even on "Star Trek."



Every company is better than your own. It's a rule of the universe.

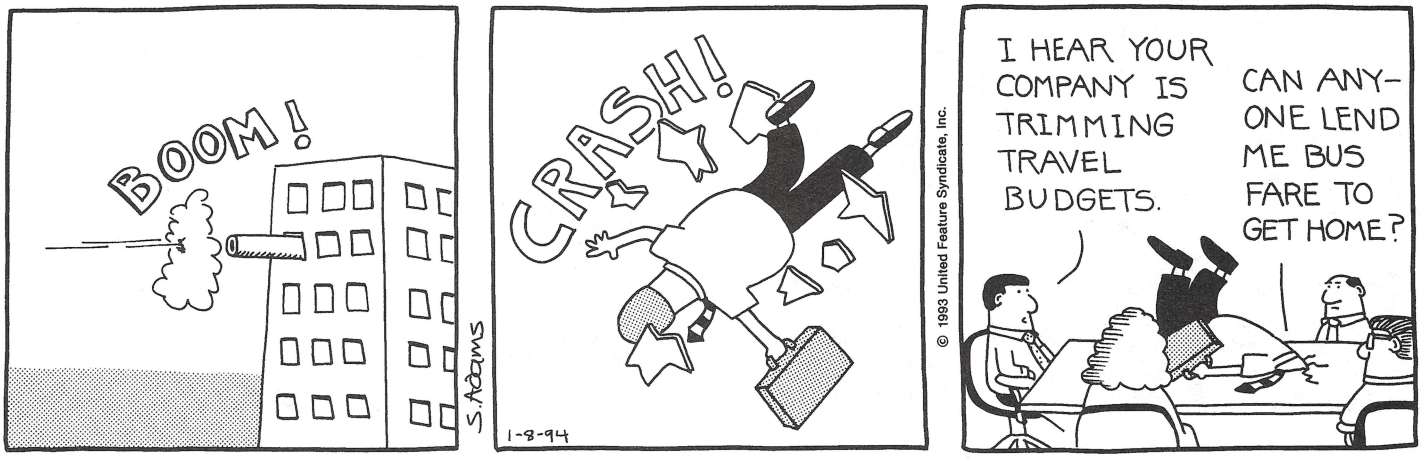


↖ Note the elaborate use of background.

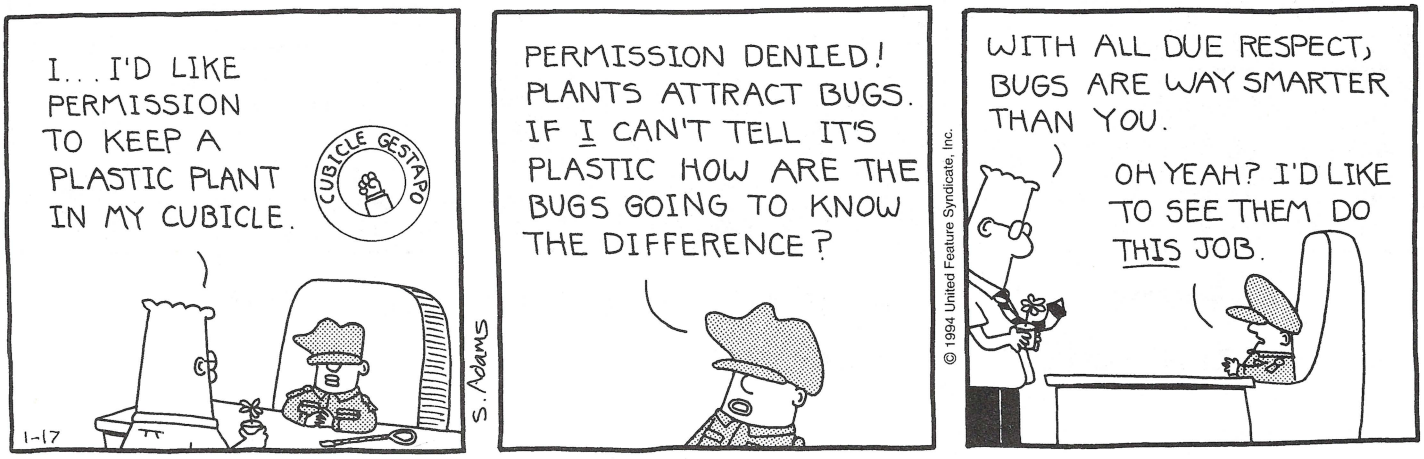


There's a reason that executives lie. The alternative is worse!

when people are mentored, they do in fact hold their arms out like that.



This is a rare action-oriented strip. I don't do many because they take longer.



when this appeared in papers, we changed "Gestapo" to "police" to avoid complaints.

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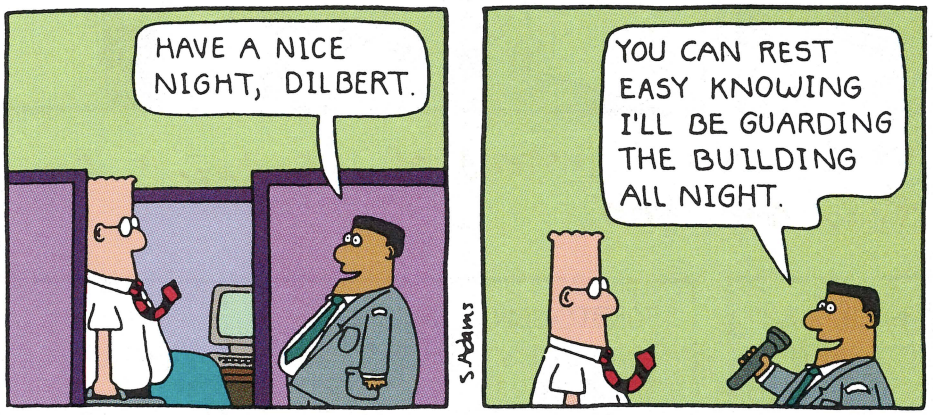
My publisher adds the color to these. They pick the worst possible times to add diversity to the cast.



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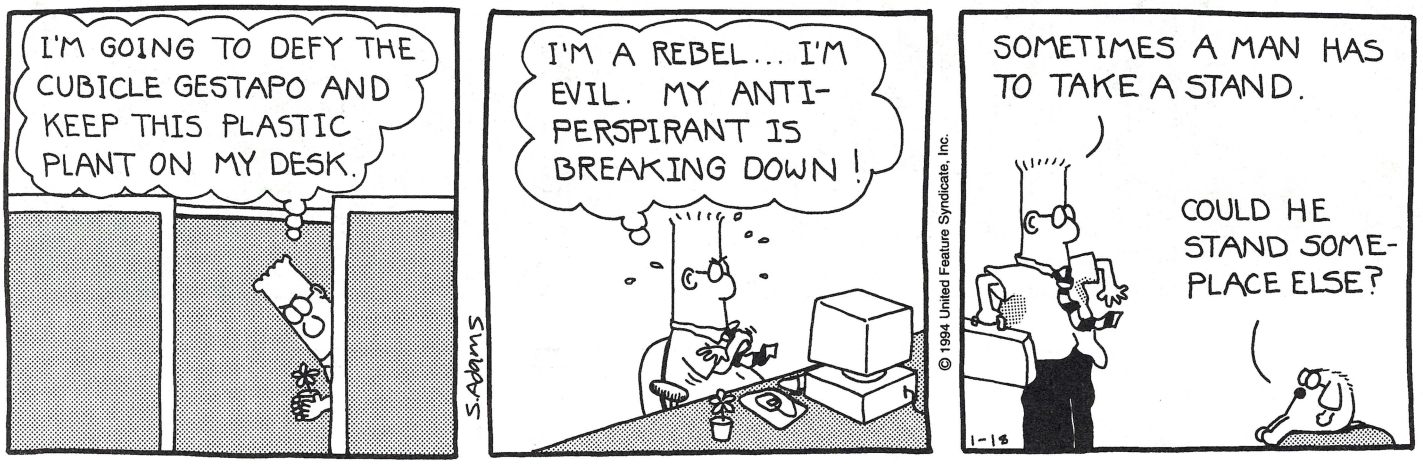
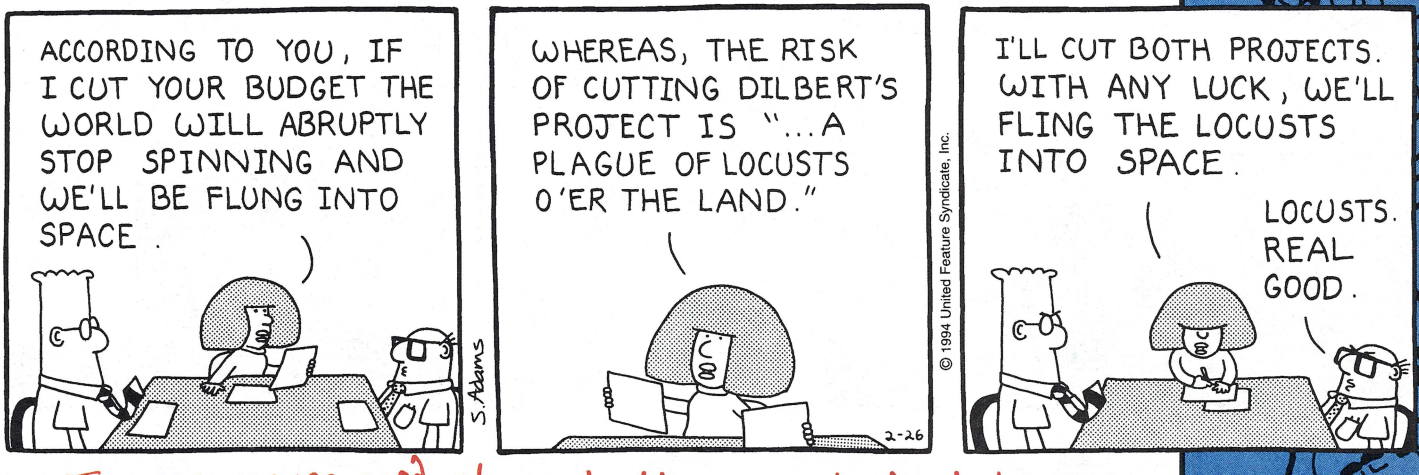


We used "police" instead of "Gestapo" for newspapers on this one too.

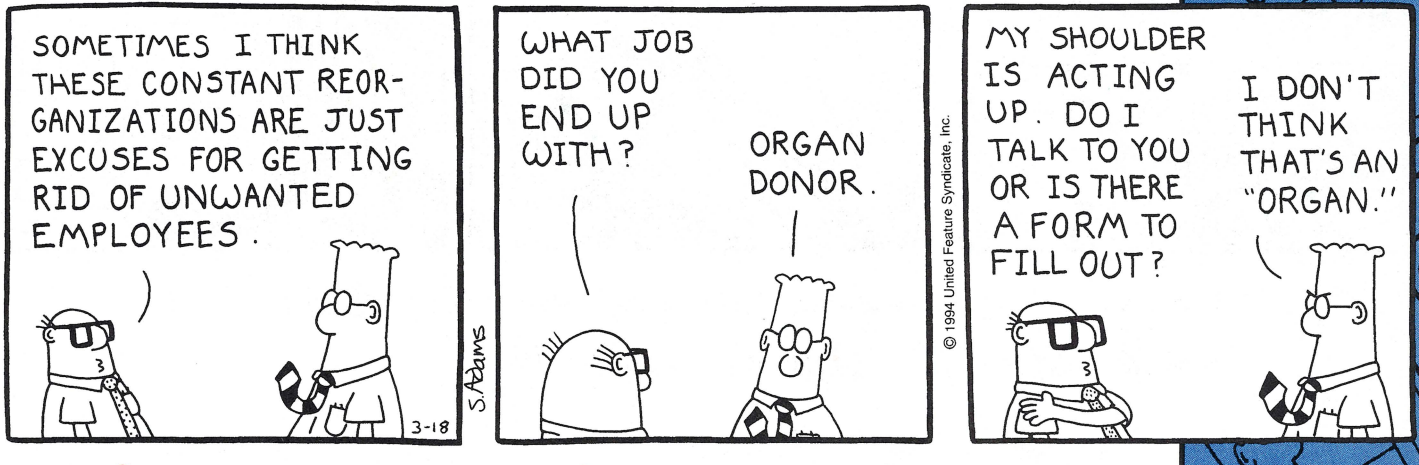
By this time I was having serious hand problems, so the lettering was being inked by another artist. My hand got much better, but I continued this method to save time.

Casual clothes are a double-edged sword.

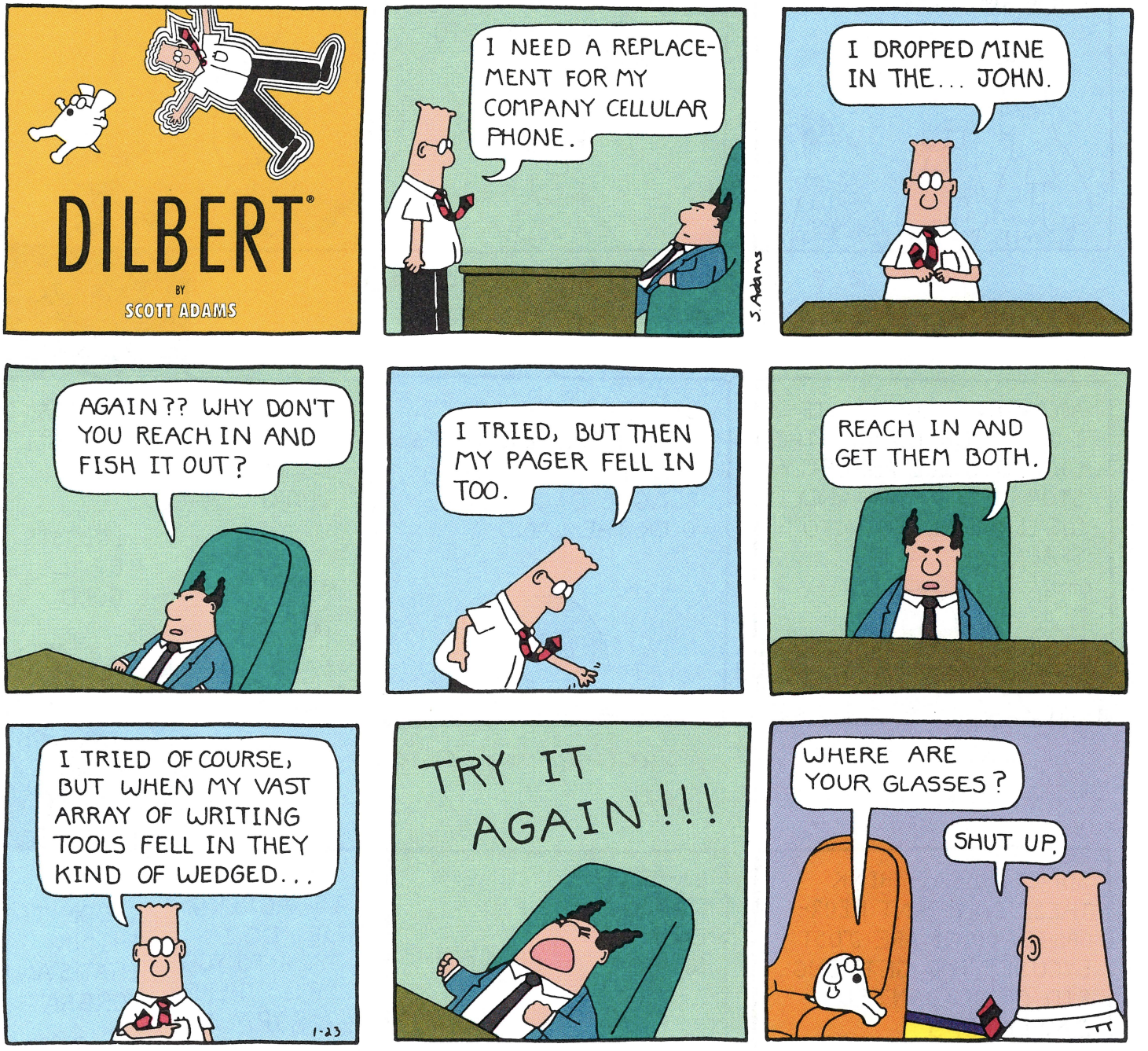
I get more requests for casual day jokes than for any other topic.



I was never good at protecting my budget because I was a terrible liar.



↖ You know it's true!



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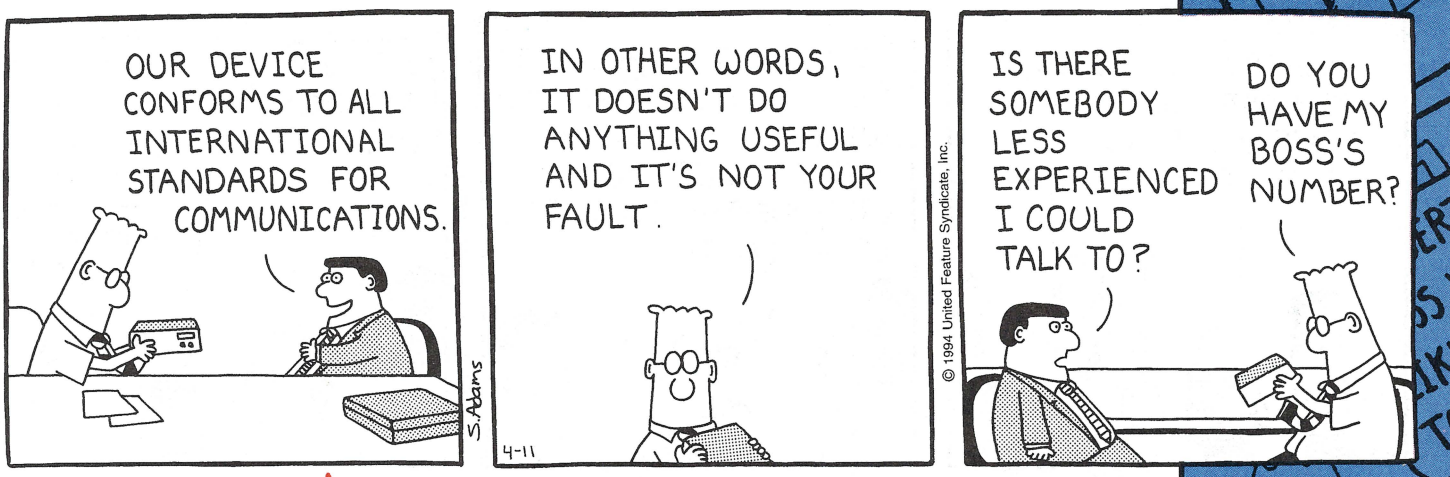
The pager-in-the-toilet problem is real. I've heard lots of stories about it.

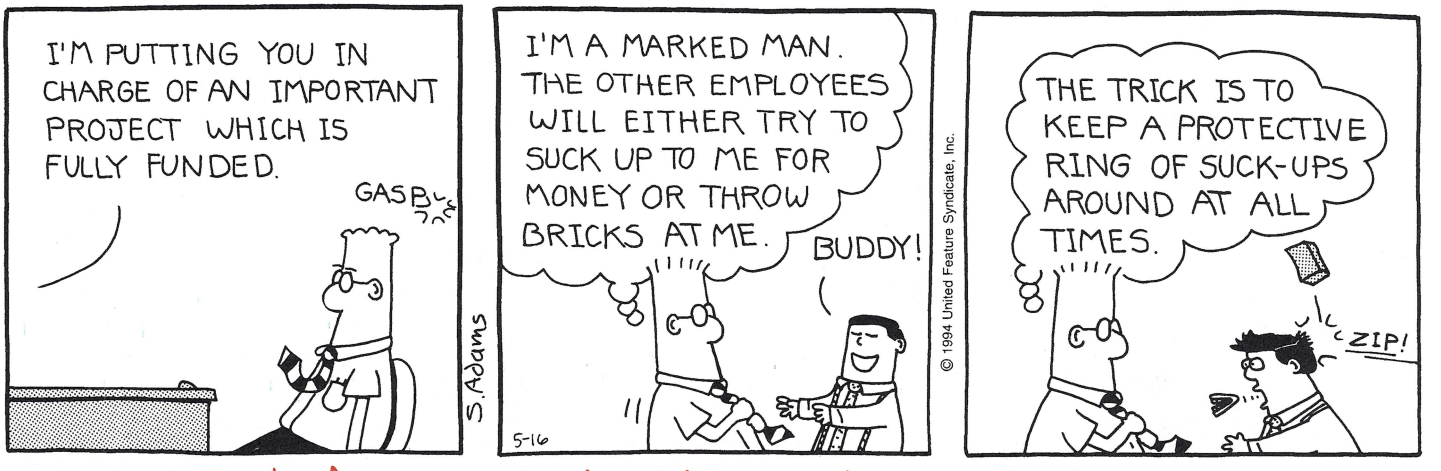


I never draw these side view mouths anymore. → Now I do these →

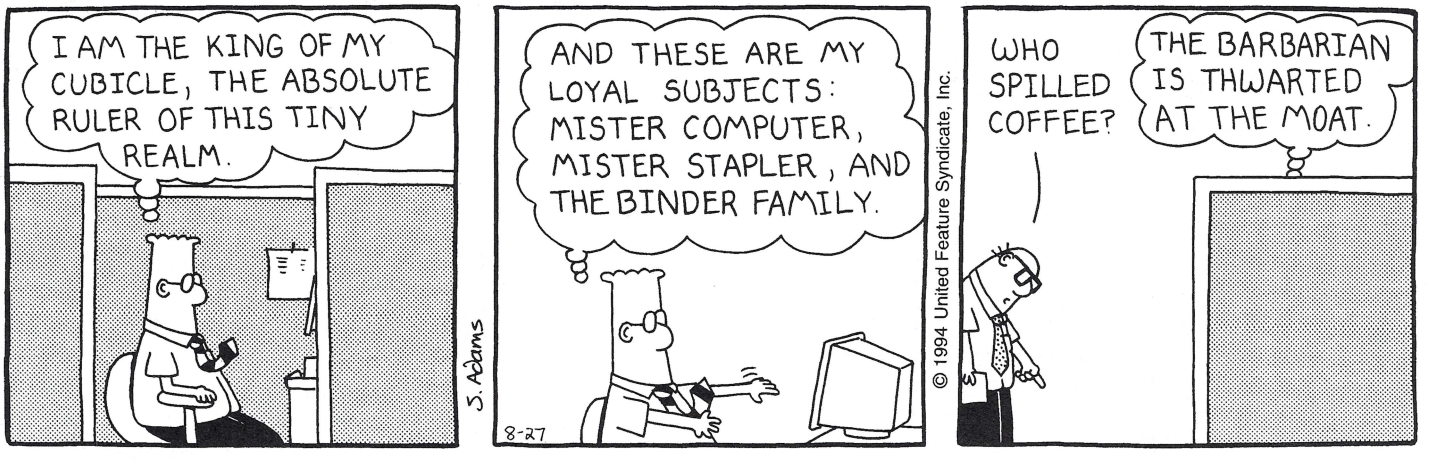
I've never accomplished anything during a Friday meeting (except getting comic fodder).

Everywhere I've lived, visitors look at my home and say, "Did you just move in?"

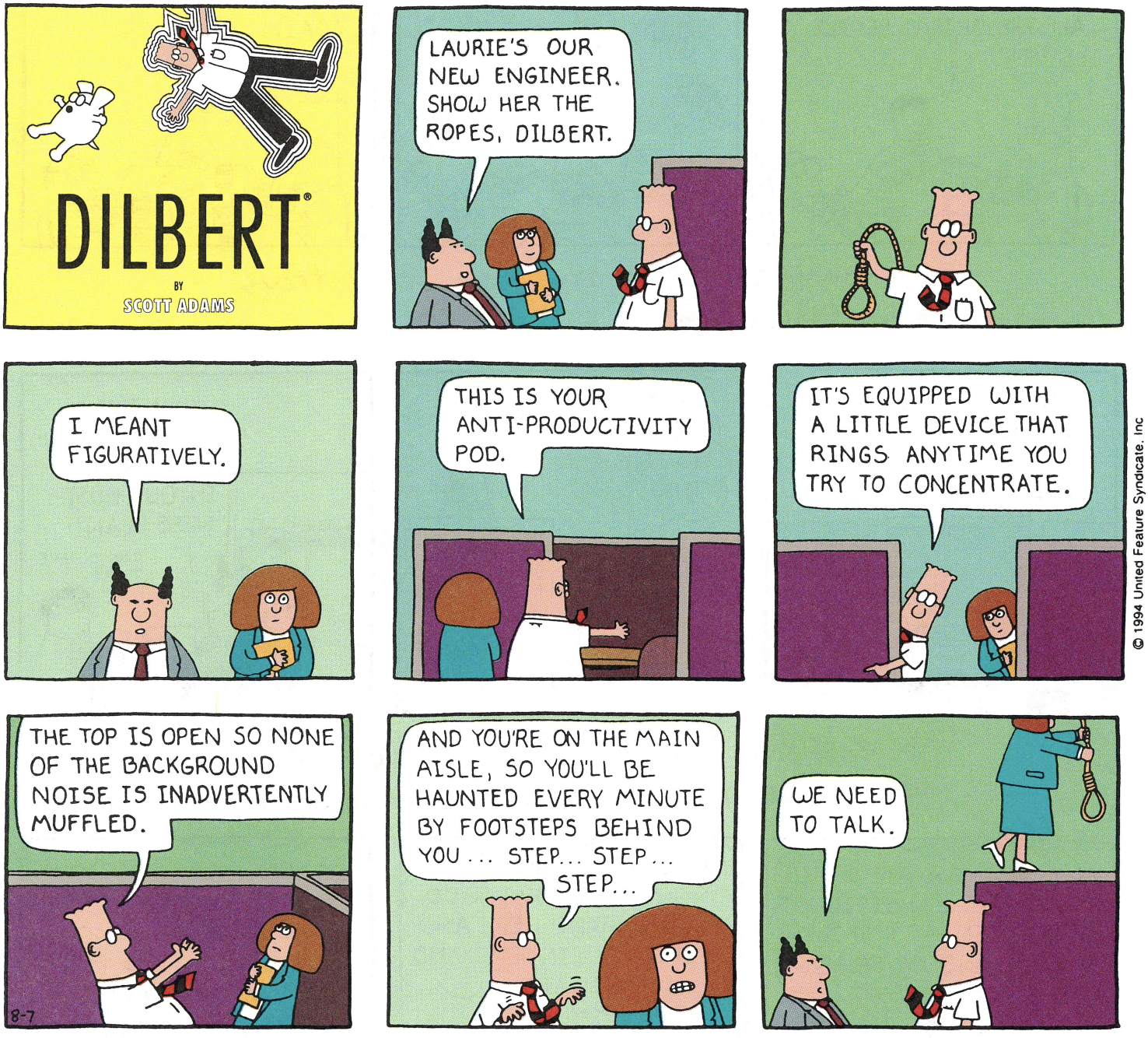
Wally looks so cute in a jacket.



I had a project with a big budget once. It was like "Night of the Living Dead" as the zombies surrounded me.



Dilbert is the kind of guy who makes the best of a situation.



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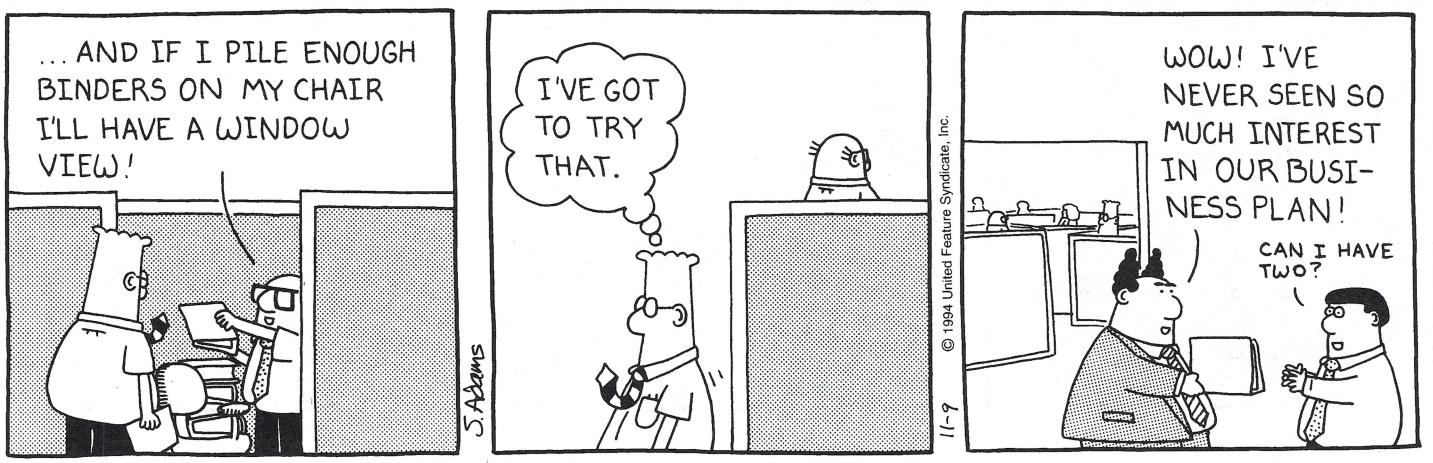
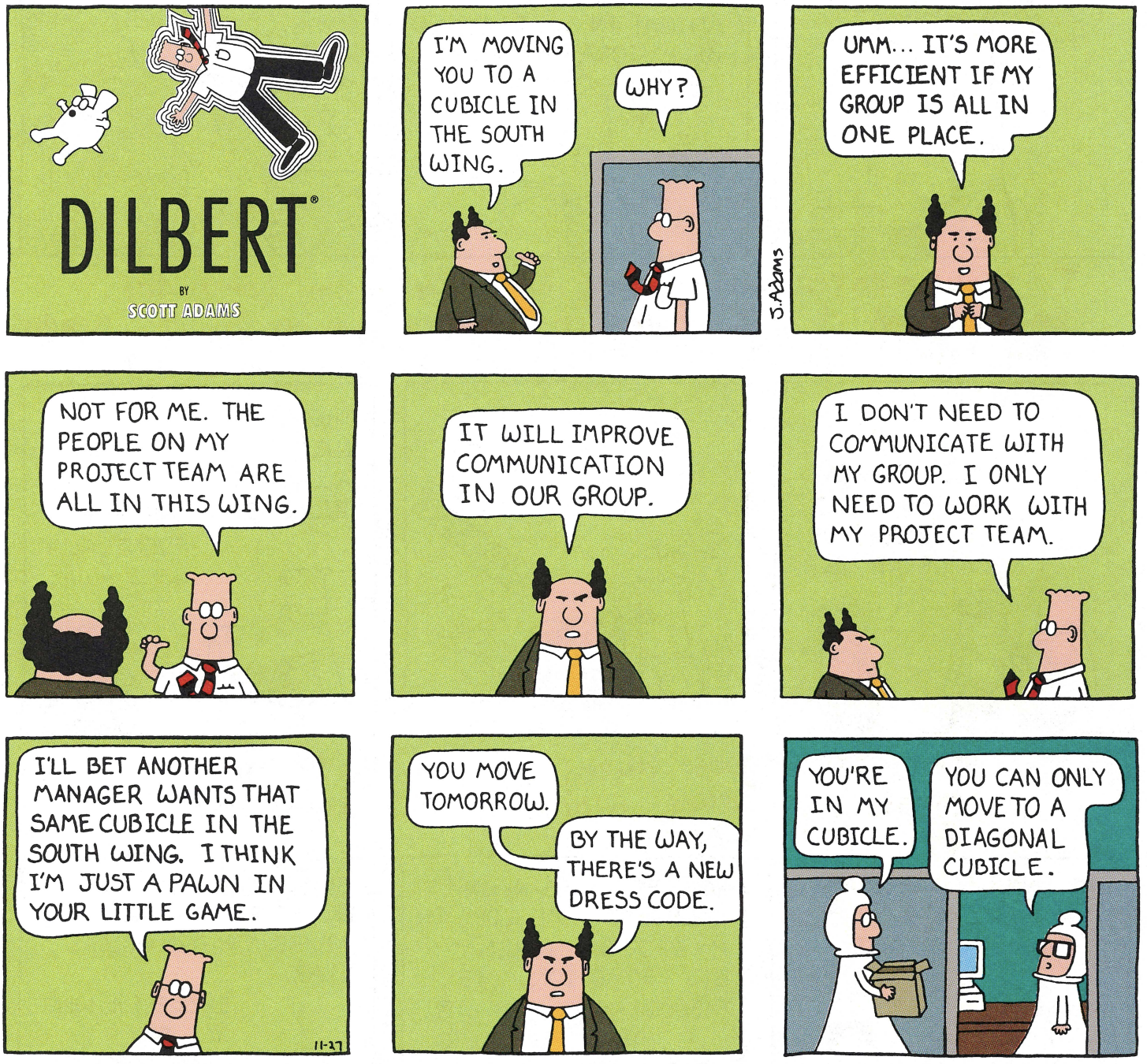
I believe cubicles were invented by someone who didn't like people.

when engineers eat bananas, it destroys their credibility.



As a rule, anything in a binder has very little value, except as building material.

↑ This happened to me often.



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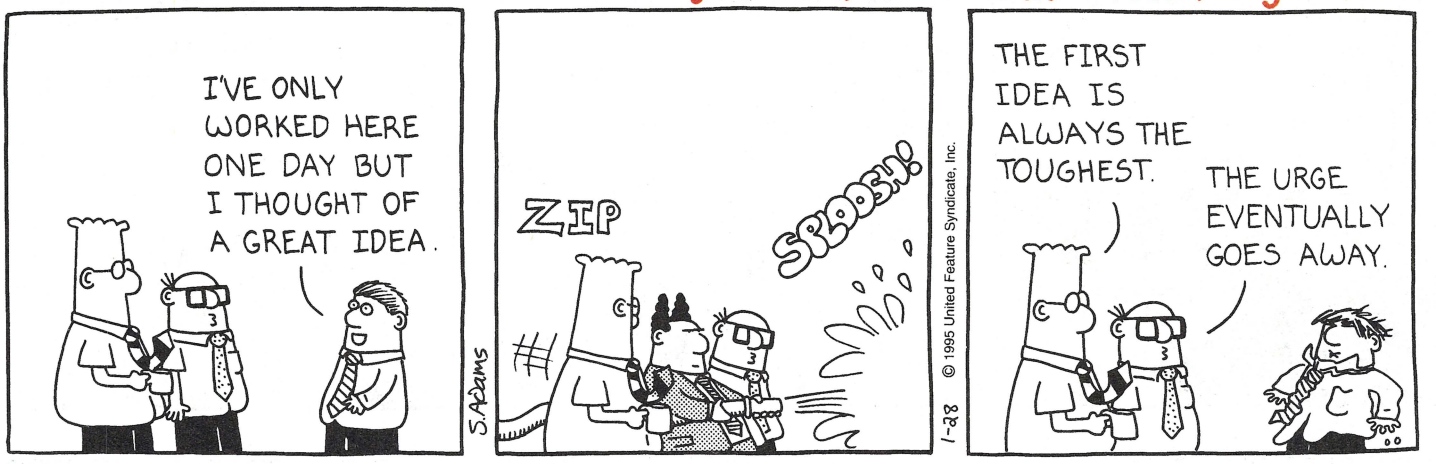
This exact thing happened to me, not counting the attractive outfit.

I experimented with doing my lettering by computer. In the end it was easier to have a human do it. Readers complained about the regularity of this lettering.



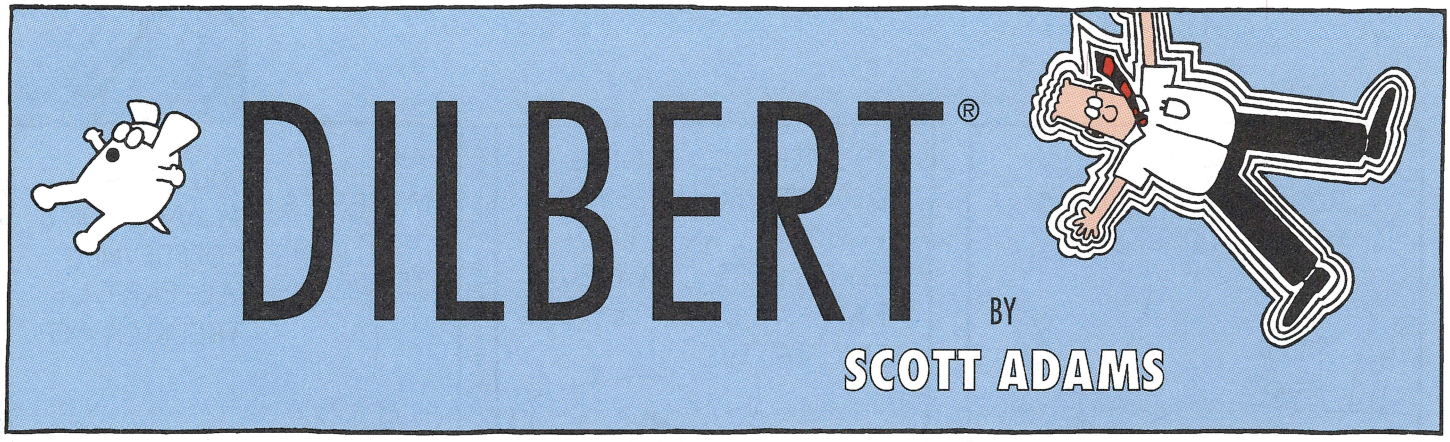
The urge goes away in the fifth year, typically. Never work in the same place for five years.

Every group has a pathological liar.

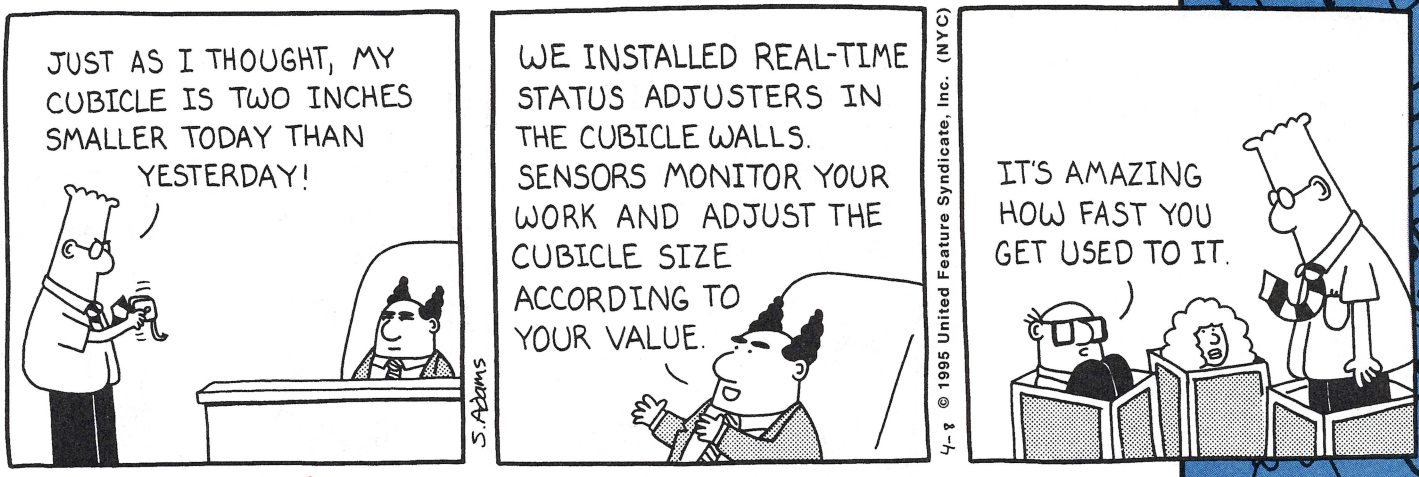
Motorola employees suggested this plot, which is loosely based on their company.

This day will come.

should have been ↑ "Mr." Smith, a reference to the old "Lost in Space" TV show.



Garbage bags are often used this way in the Seattle area. They call it an "Engineer's Raincoat!"



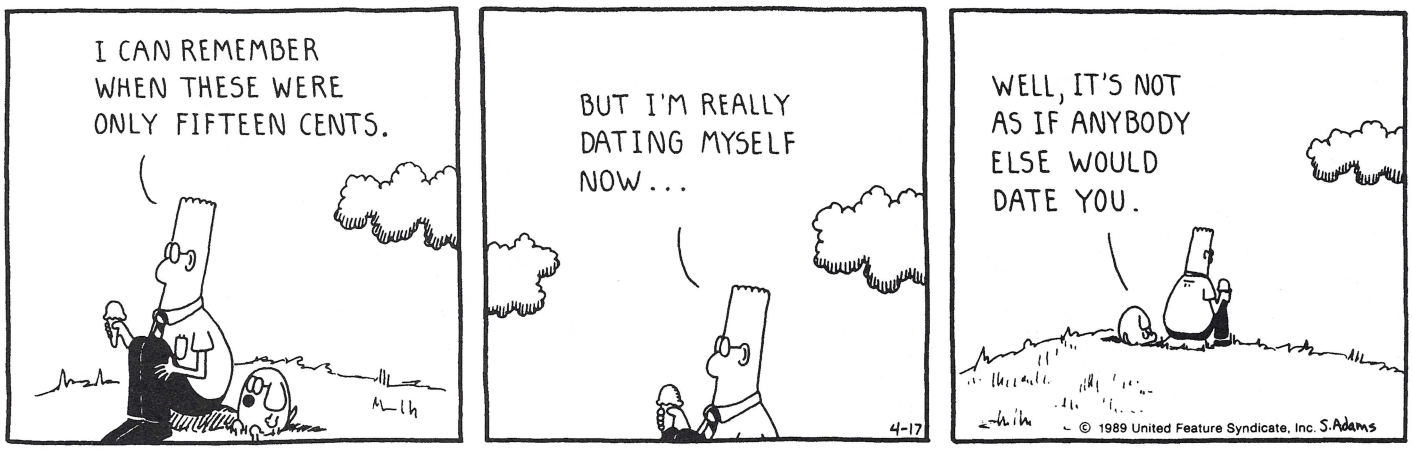
At Digital Equipment Corporation they call this process "Densification."

cubicles are better than maximum-security prisons, but about the same as minimum-security, I'll bet.

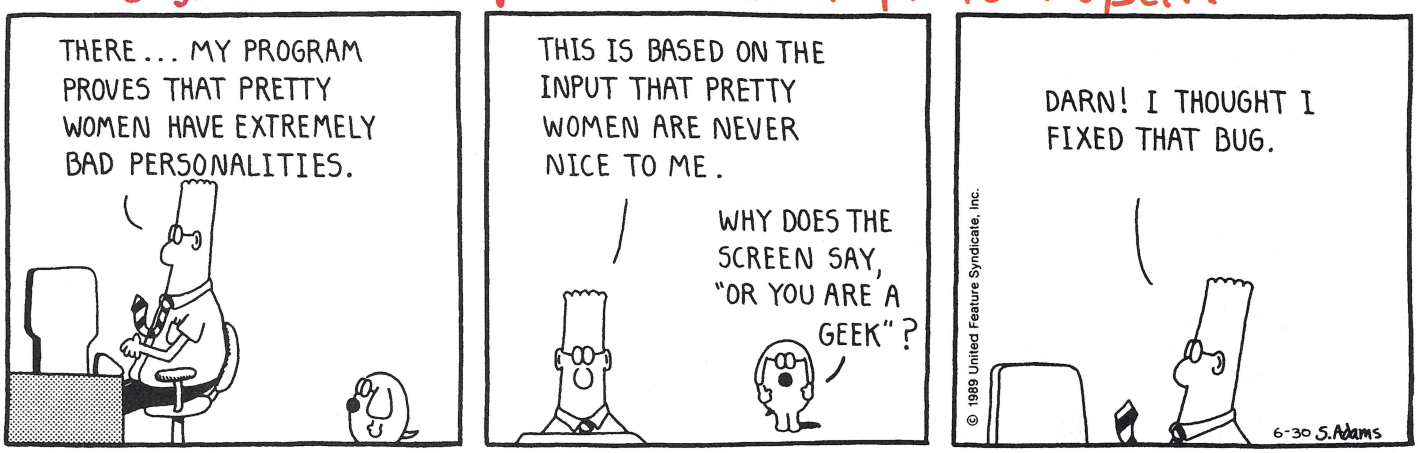
I like to put opposites together. I've heard stories about motivational speakers who depress people.

I heard from lots of people named Griffin.

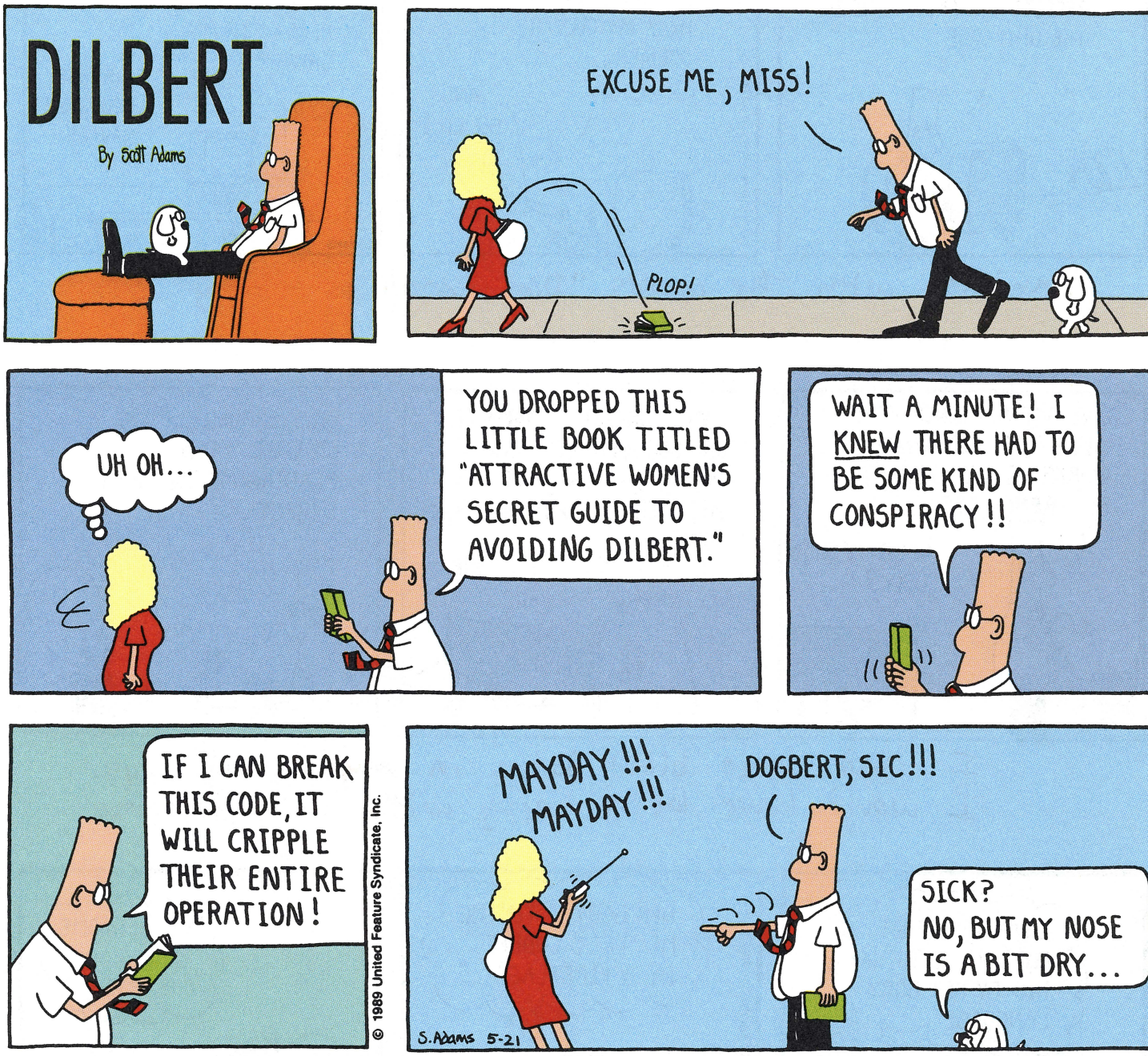
. . . and Women



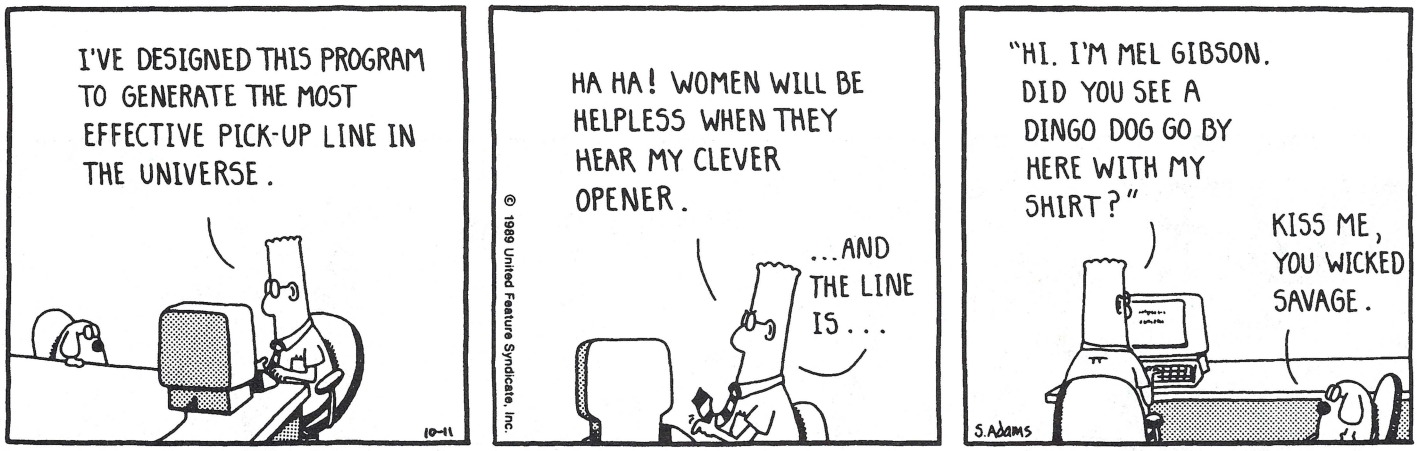
This is the very first Dilbert strip published. The setup line is something I heard from a lonely engineer. The punchline I kept to myself.



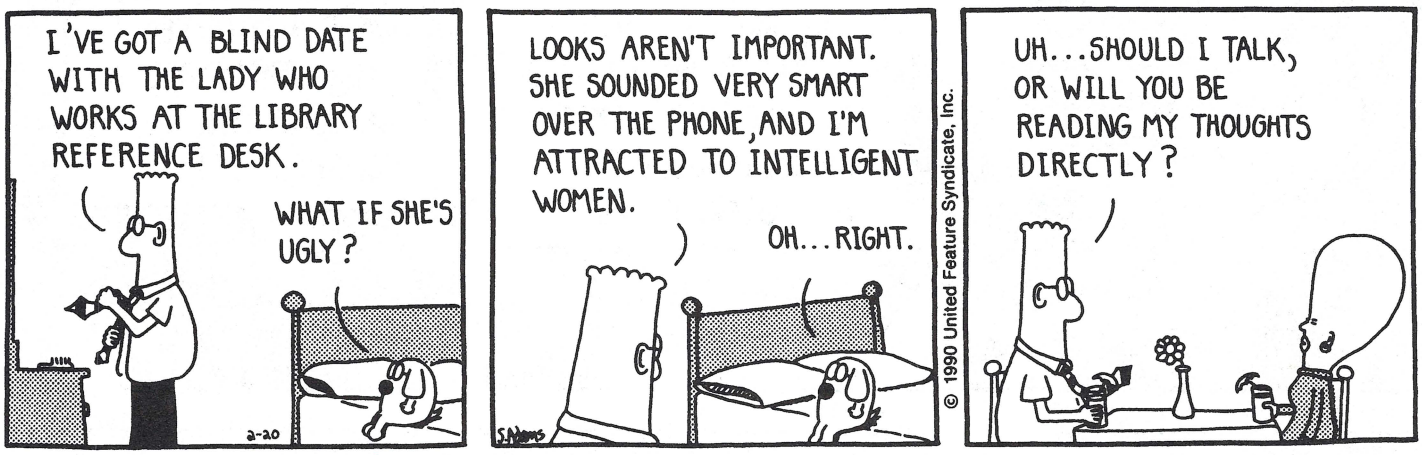
This was based on my personal experience.



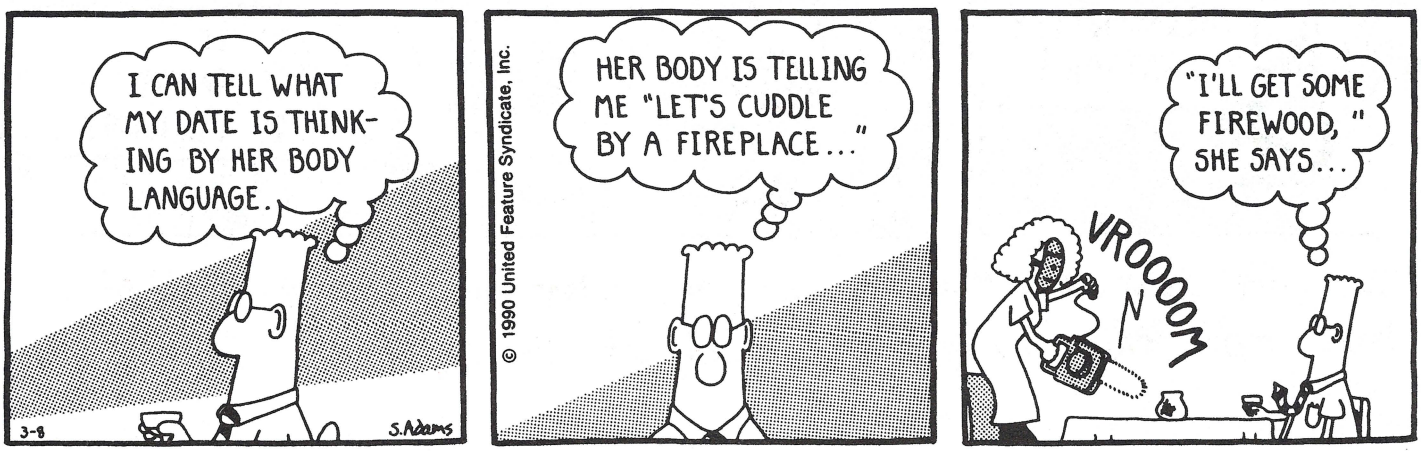
I was just starting as a cartoonist and hadn't decided how to draw women's faces at this point.



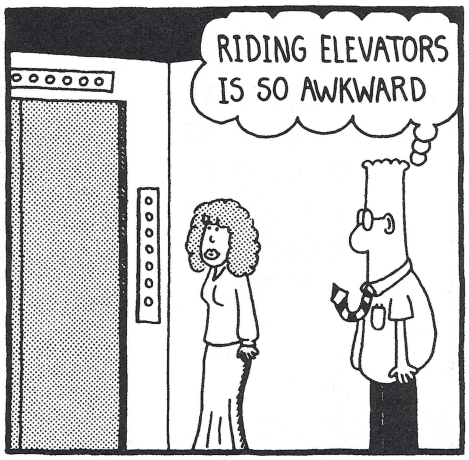
Anything with the words "Dingo dog" is funny.

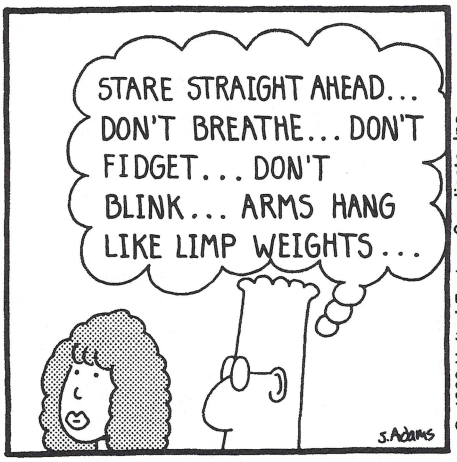


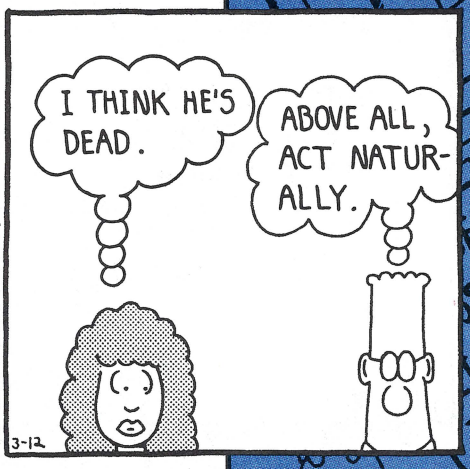
I had some blind dates in my dating days.
I would have been happy with this outcome.



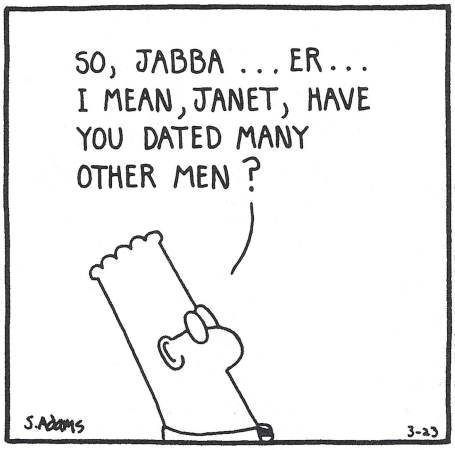
If men were perceptive, they'd never get lucky.





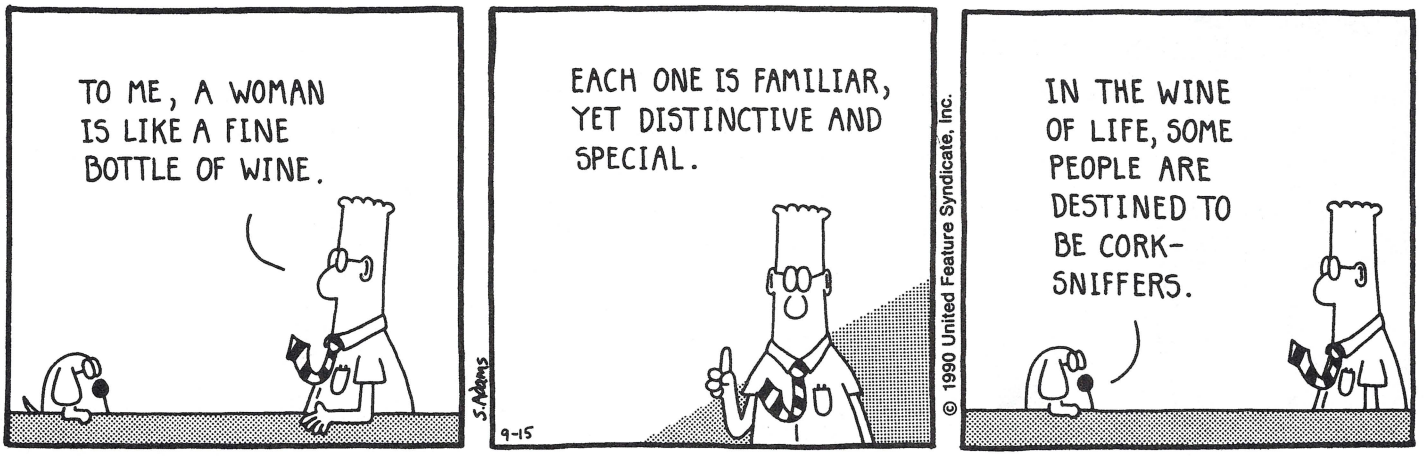


I've actually stopped breathing in elevators because I think it sounds loud.



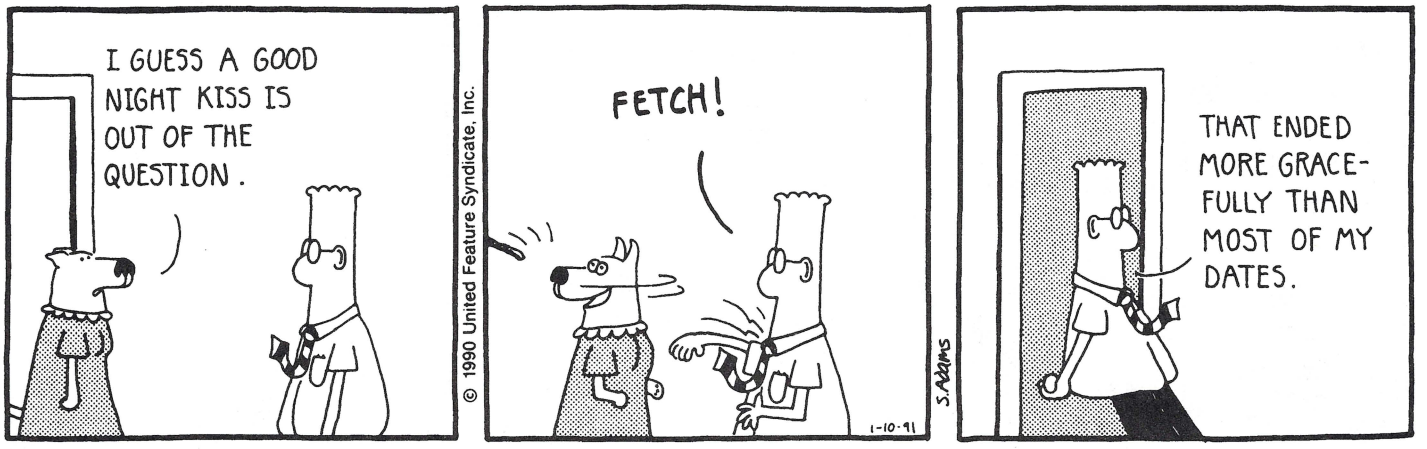
I took a lot of heat for this cartoon. I meant it to be about a woman who was gigantic in general, but it comes off as a fat joke.

Do frogs have noses? They're hard to draw.

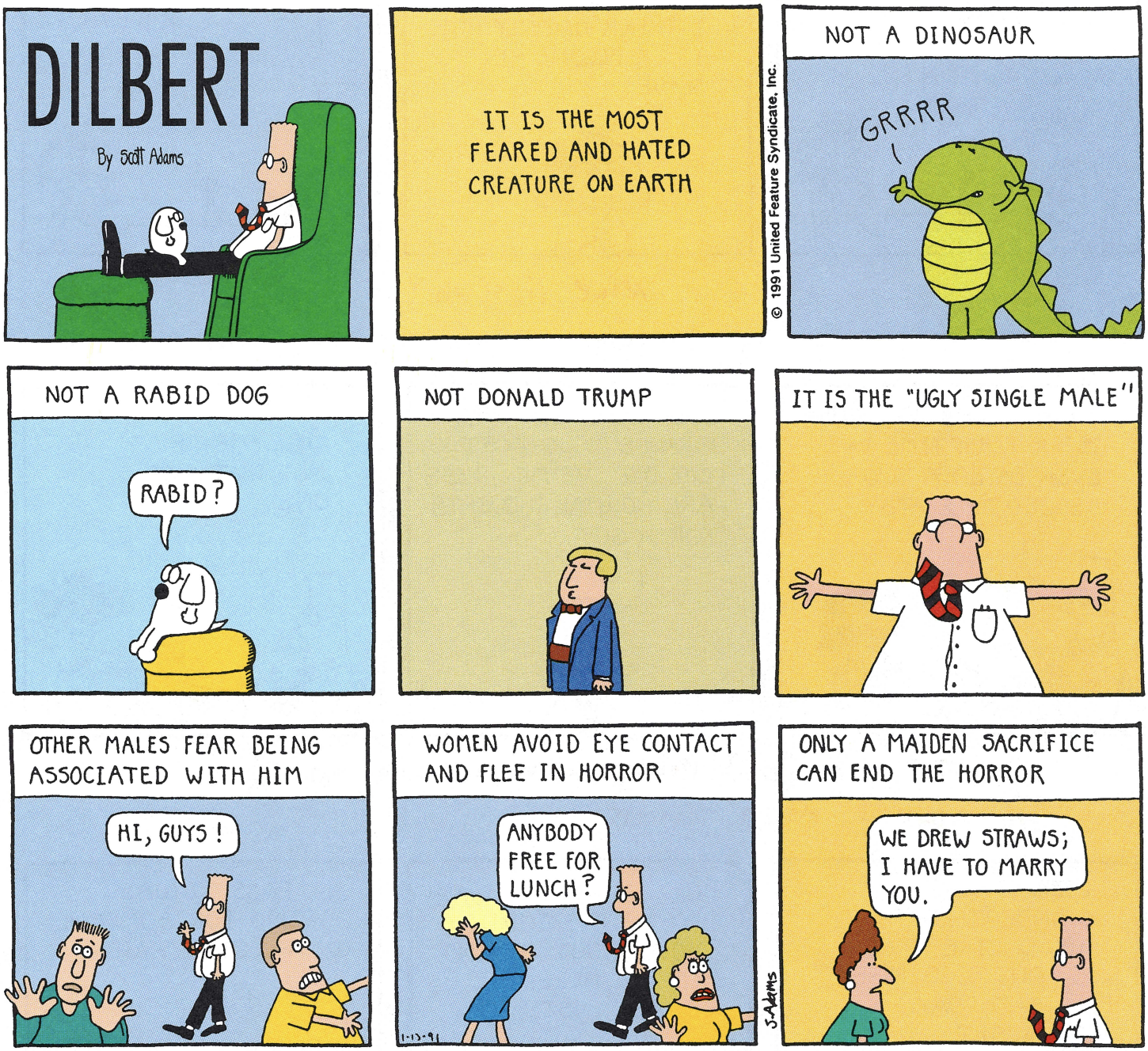


This sounds naughtier than it is.

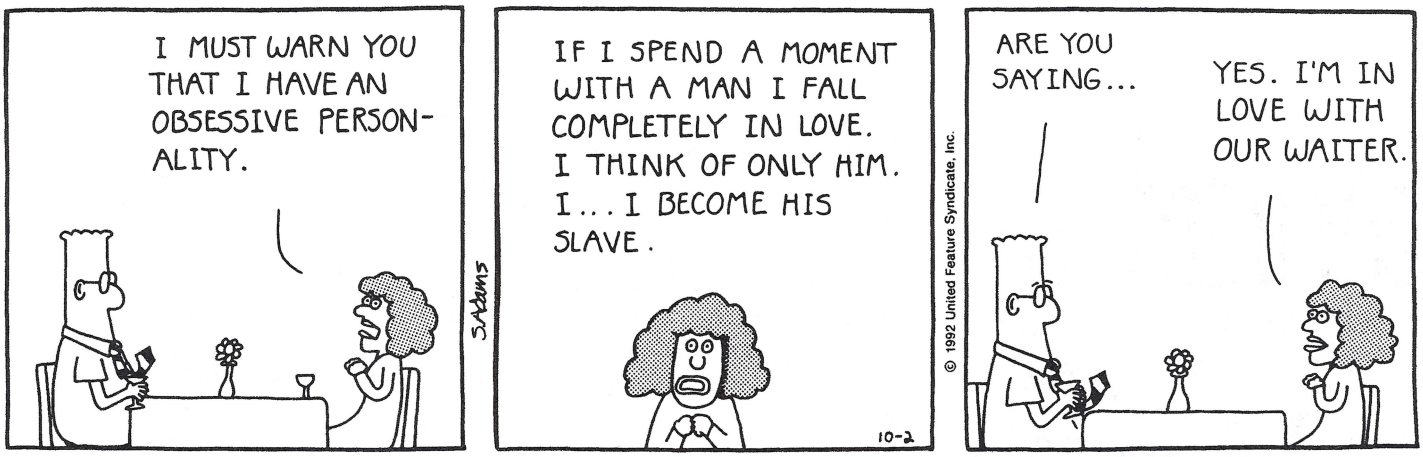
Talking dogs are funny.



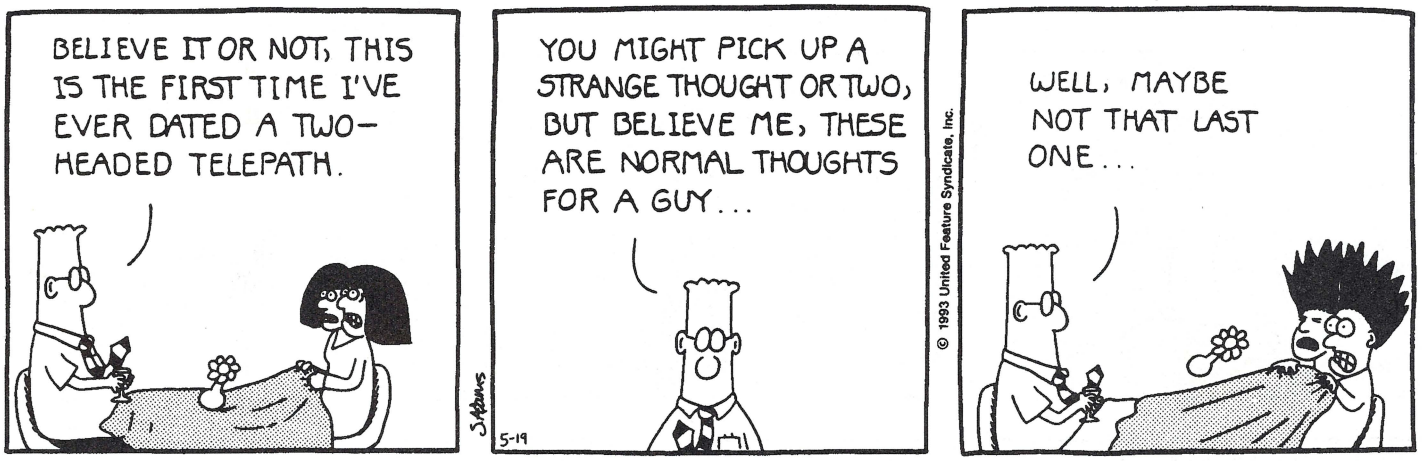
what do you do at the end of a bad date?



The original text said "Virgin" not "maiden." It was softened so it wouldn't draw complaints in conservative towns.

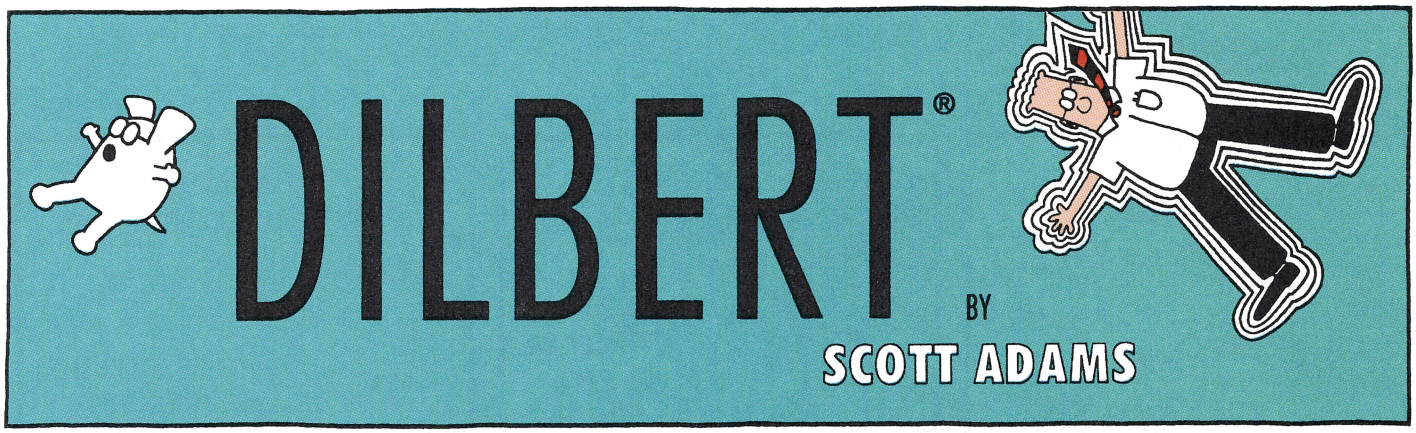


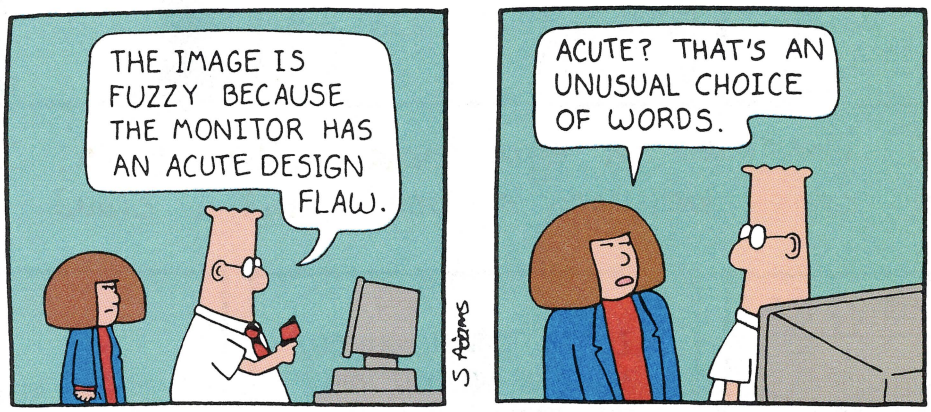
Nice lips, eh?

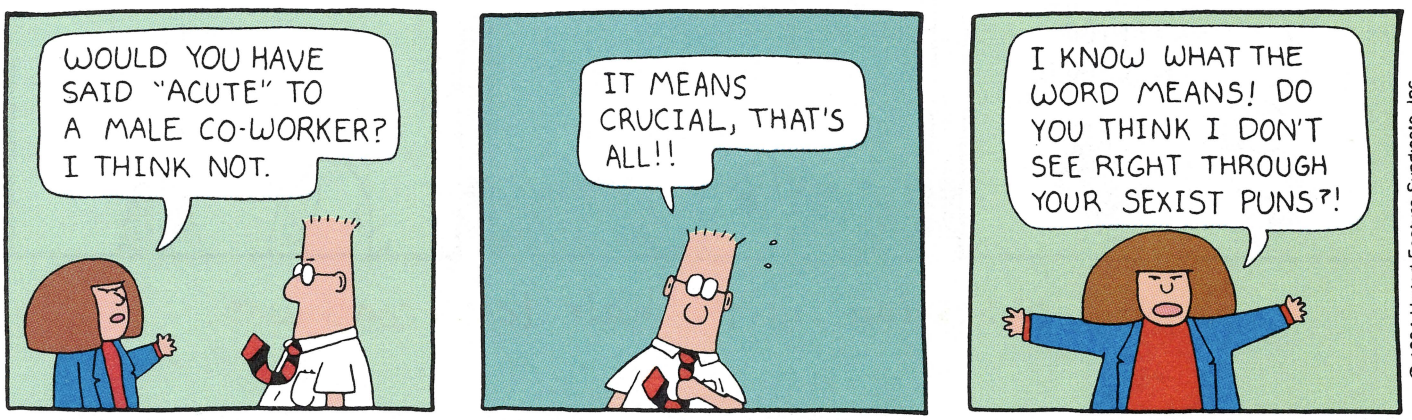


It's a good thing women have no idea what men think.

My first girlfriend used to use this excuse.







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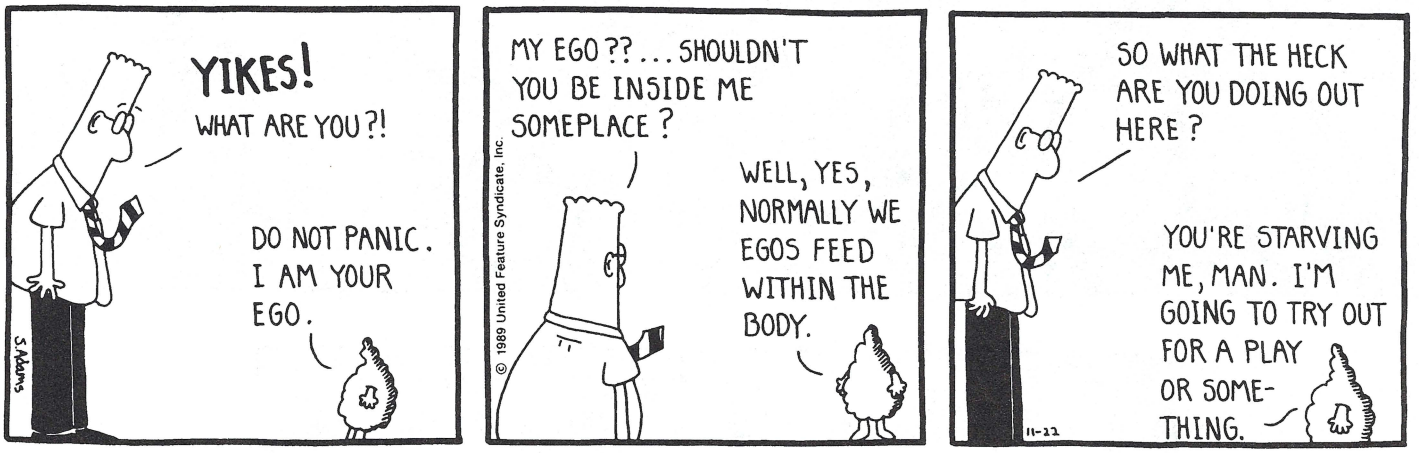
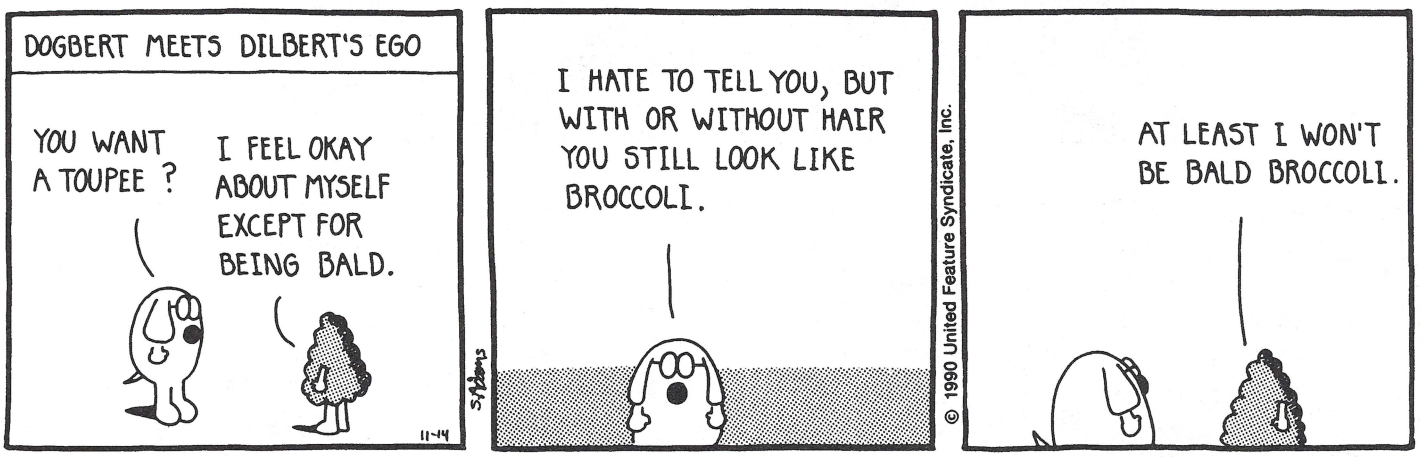
A lot of readers didn't get this one.
Hint: which = witch.

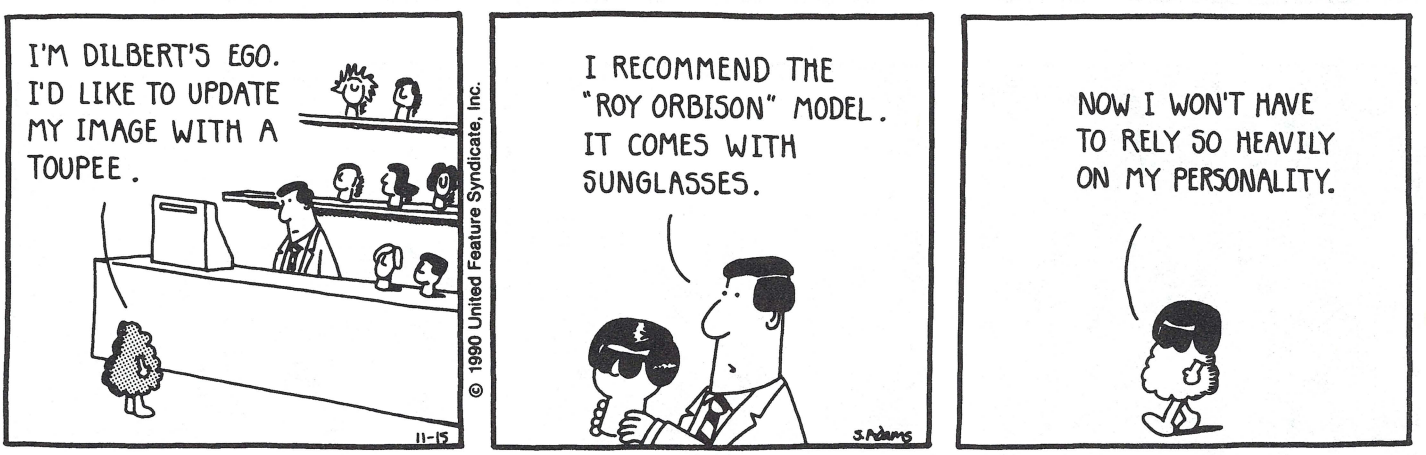
. . . and His Ego



I imagine an ego looks like this. It's a cross between a brain and a cloud.



My obsession with hair loss continues.

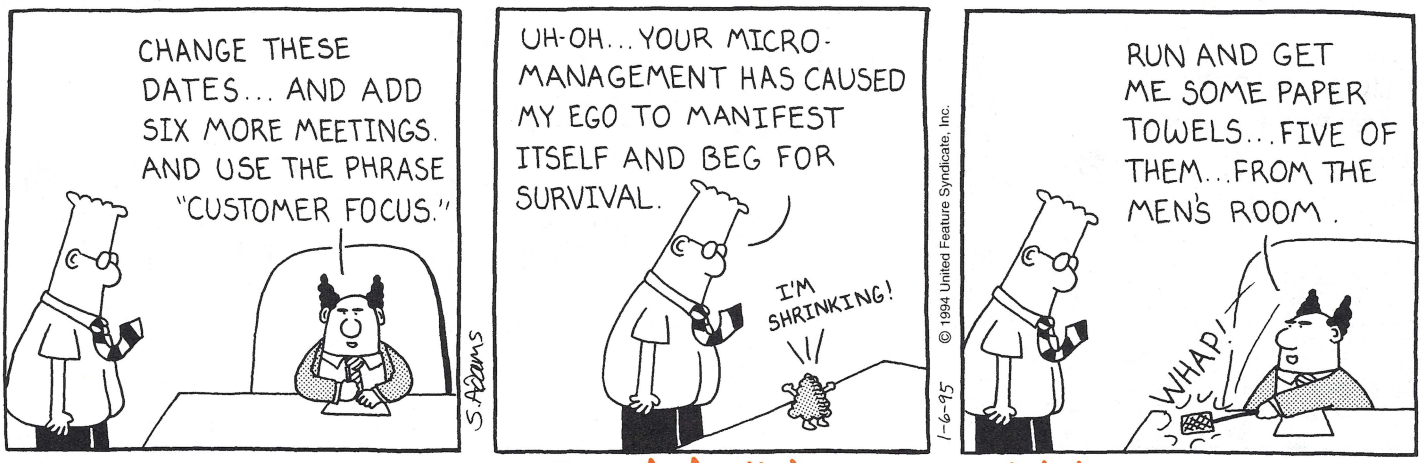


This is the sort of cartoon I draw when I'm not getting enough sleep.

I couldn't figure out how to end this sequence...

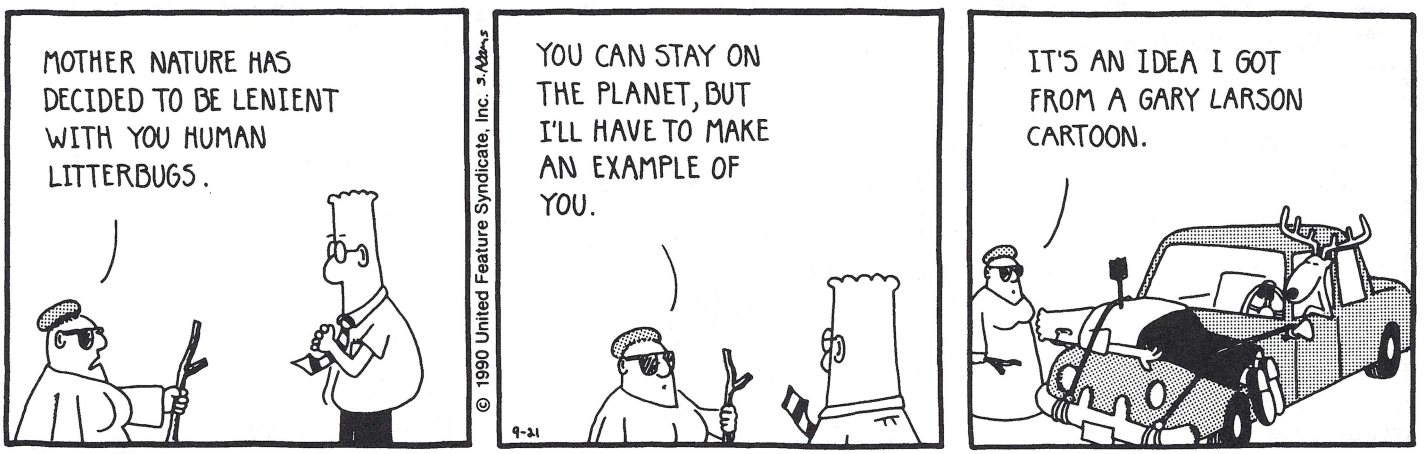
...It just kept getting stranger.

There!



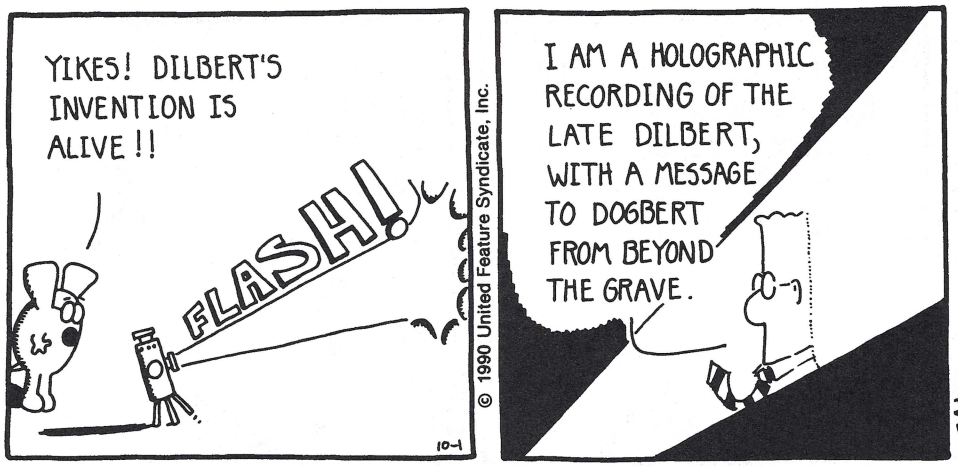
I ended this one quickly.

. . . Dies



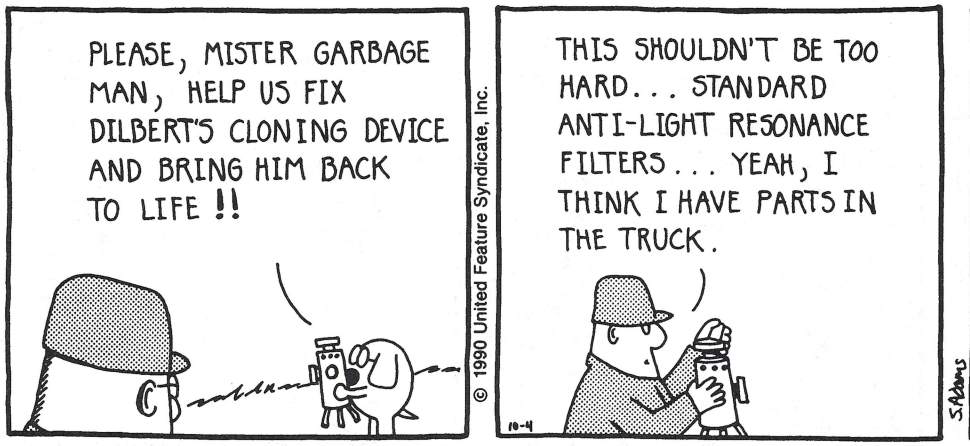
I killed Dilbert because sales to newspapers were slow. I thought this would shake things up. I don't think anyone noticed.

I want to be stuffed when I die.



↑He's so cute with his ears up.

My bid for reader sympathy failed. I decided to bring Dilbert back.



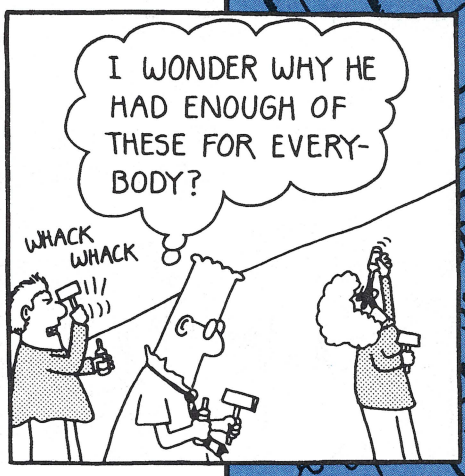
Is anti-light the same as dark?

I was tired of this series, but it needed a conclusion.

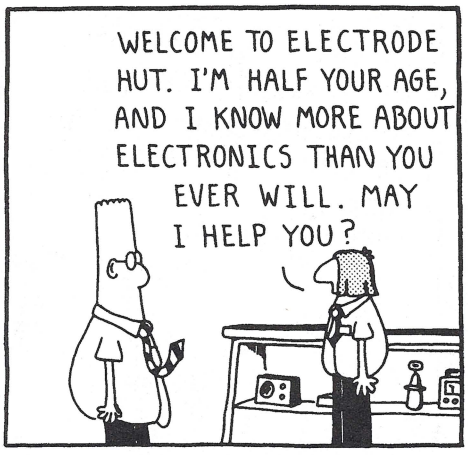
. . . Travels

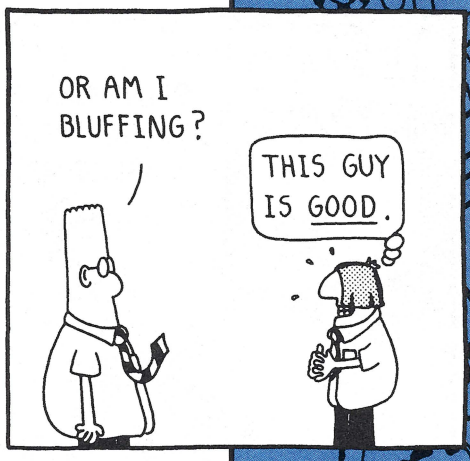
It seems as if I always get the worst seat.

I got complaints from people who don't think Cannibal jokes are funny.

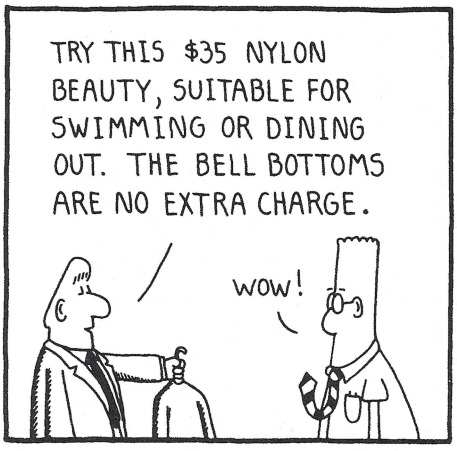


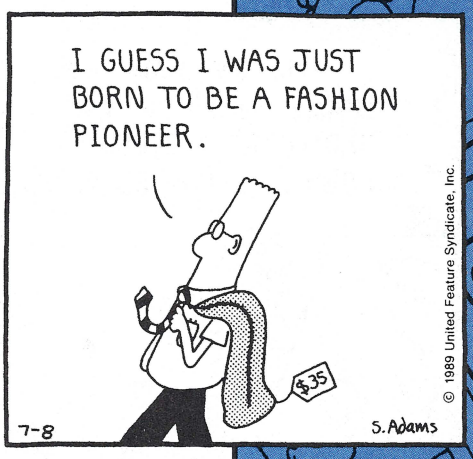
. . . Attempts to Join the Consumer Society



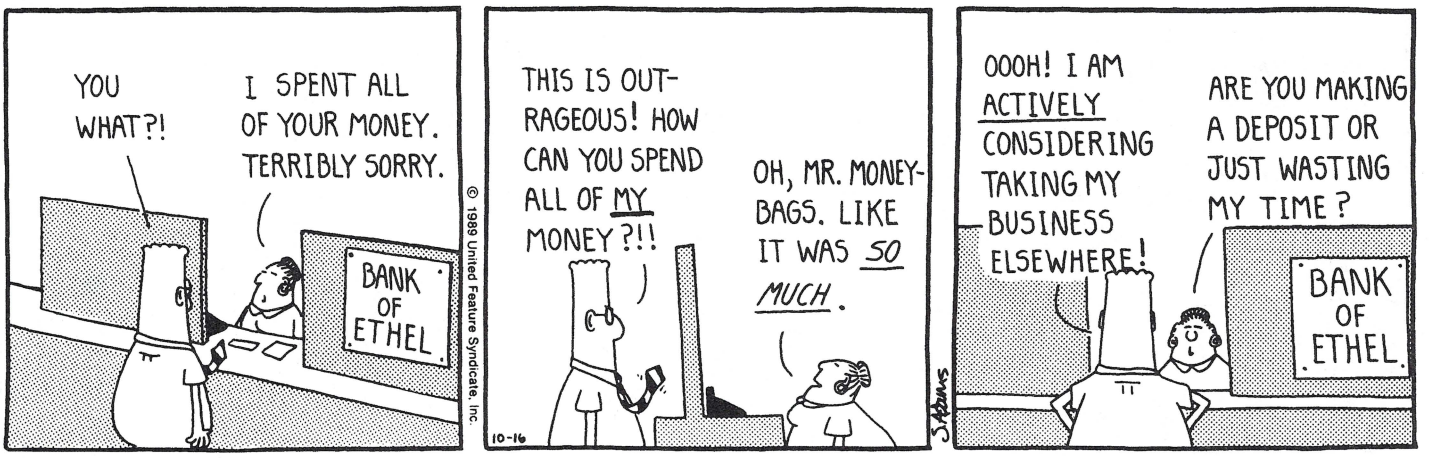


In case you wondered, there's no such things as NIAD Pulse converters or ANZA Brushes.



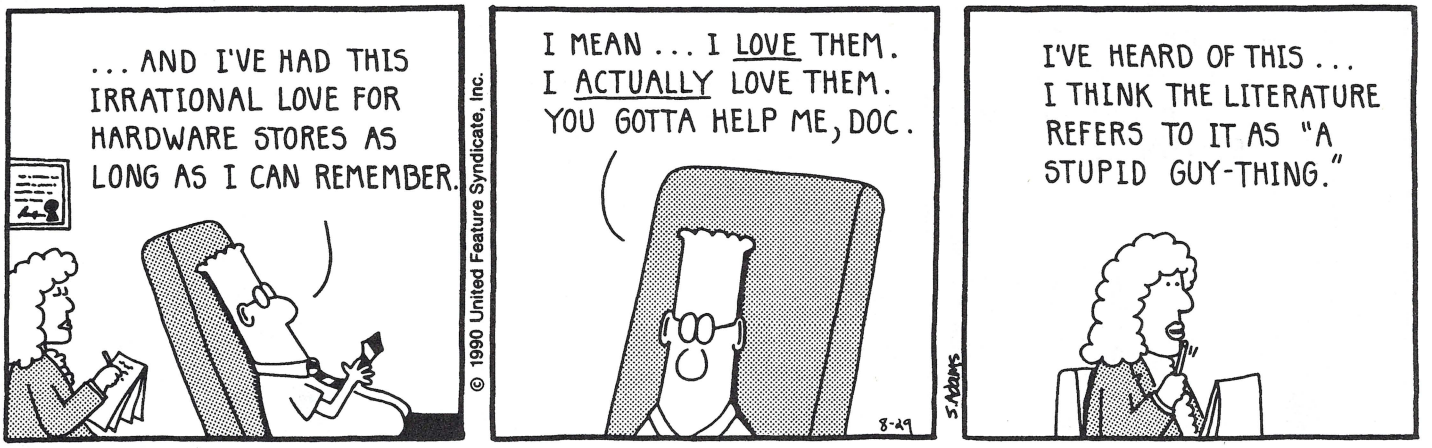


My pet peeve is that salespeople always steer me to the cheapest items.



My first job was as a bank teller.

I love tools, even though I don't use them.

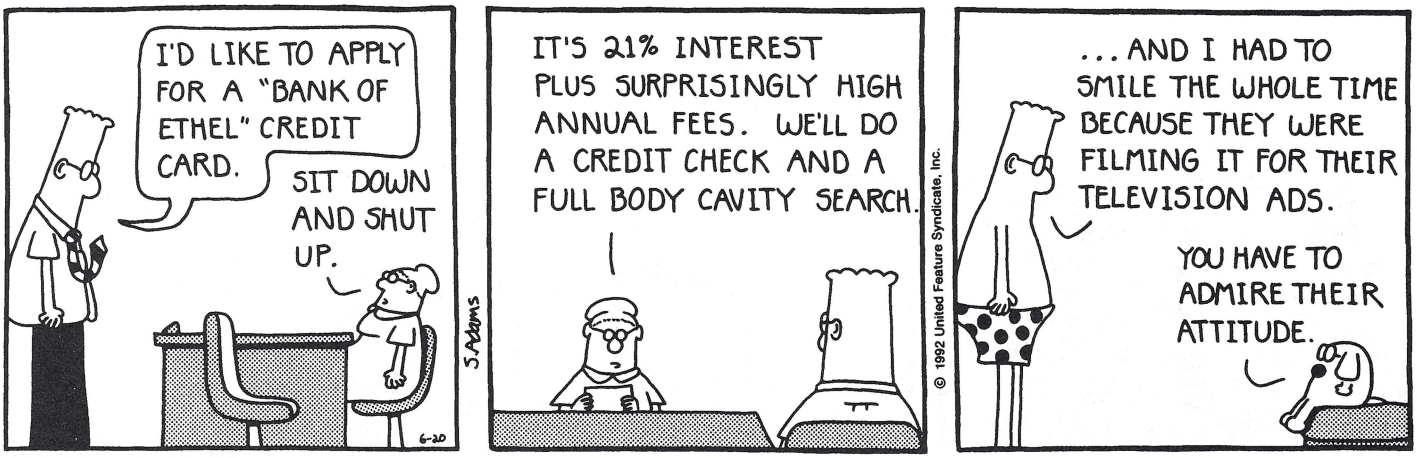


Women don't understand.

When I was a bank teller, I was robbed twice at gunpoint. I fantasized about beating up customers.

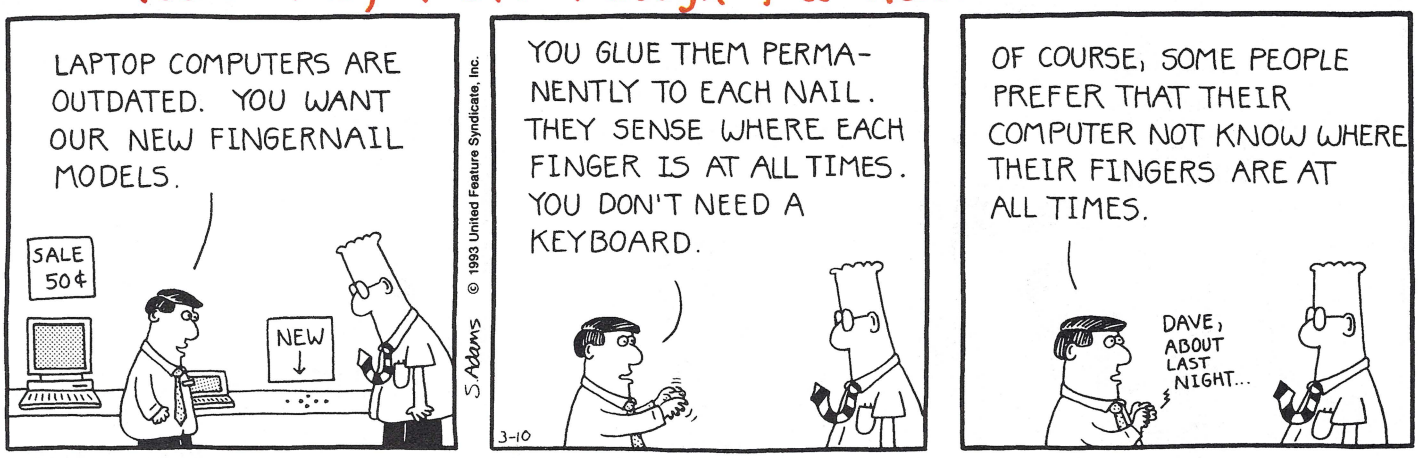
I'm a shy shopper. I don't like to be a burden to the salespeople so I always say, "Just looking."

If this existed, someone would buy it.



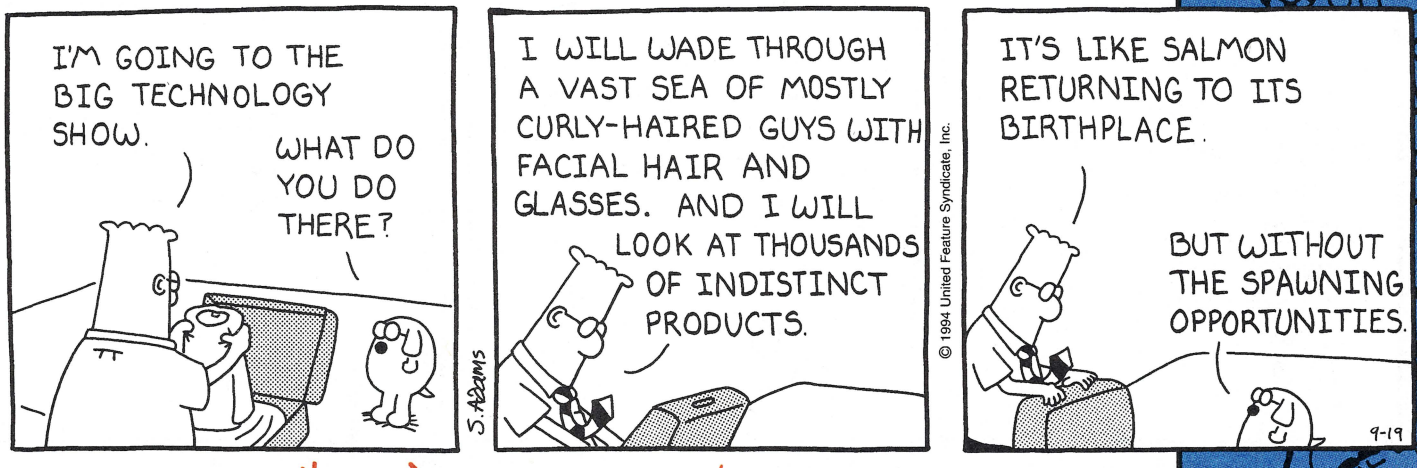
It's funny to me that I have to prove to the bank that I'm honest.

When I was a kid, my grandmother convinced me that brown eggs were tastier. Now I just wonder what route they took through the hen.

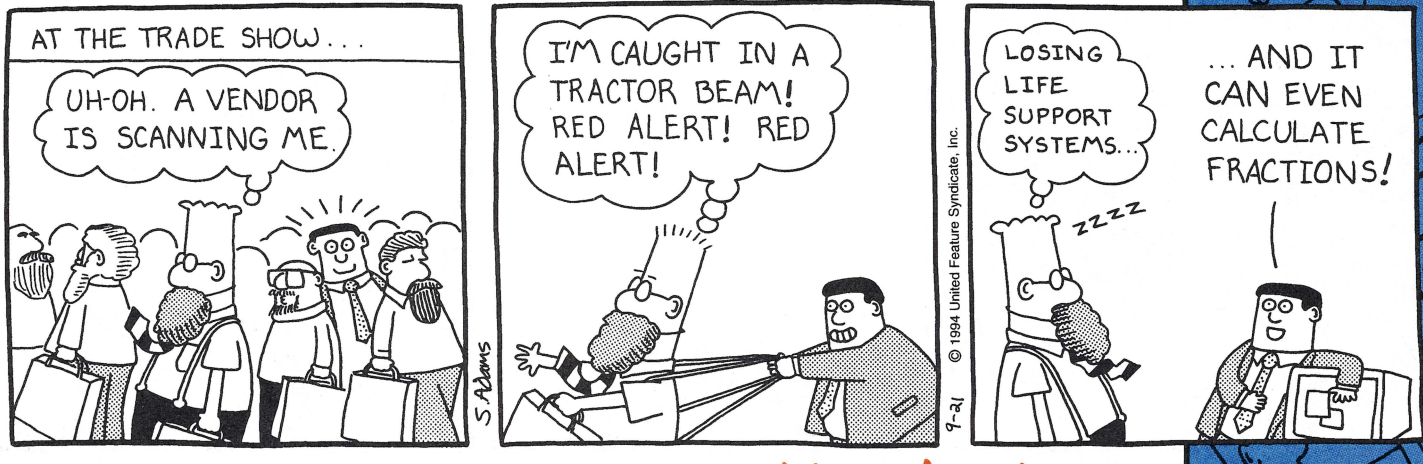


This might actually work someday.

I believe all salespeople hate me. If they didn't before, they do now.



why do so many technology people have curly hair and glasses?



All vendor demos are boring. It's the law, I think.

I support equal rights for pets.

In the beginning, Dogbert still had traces of dog-like behavior.

My cat does this. ↴

DOGBERT

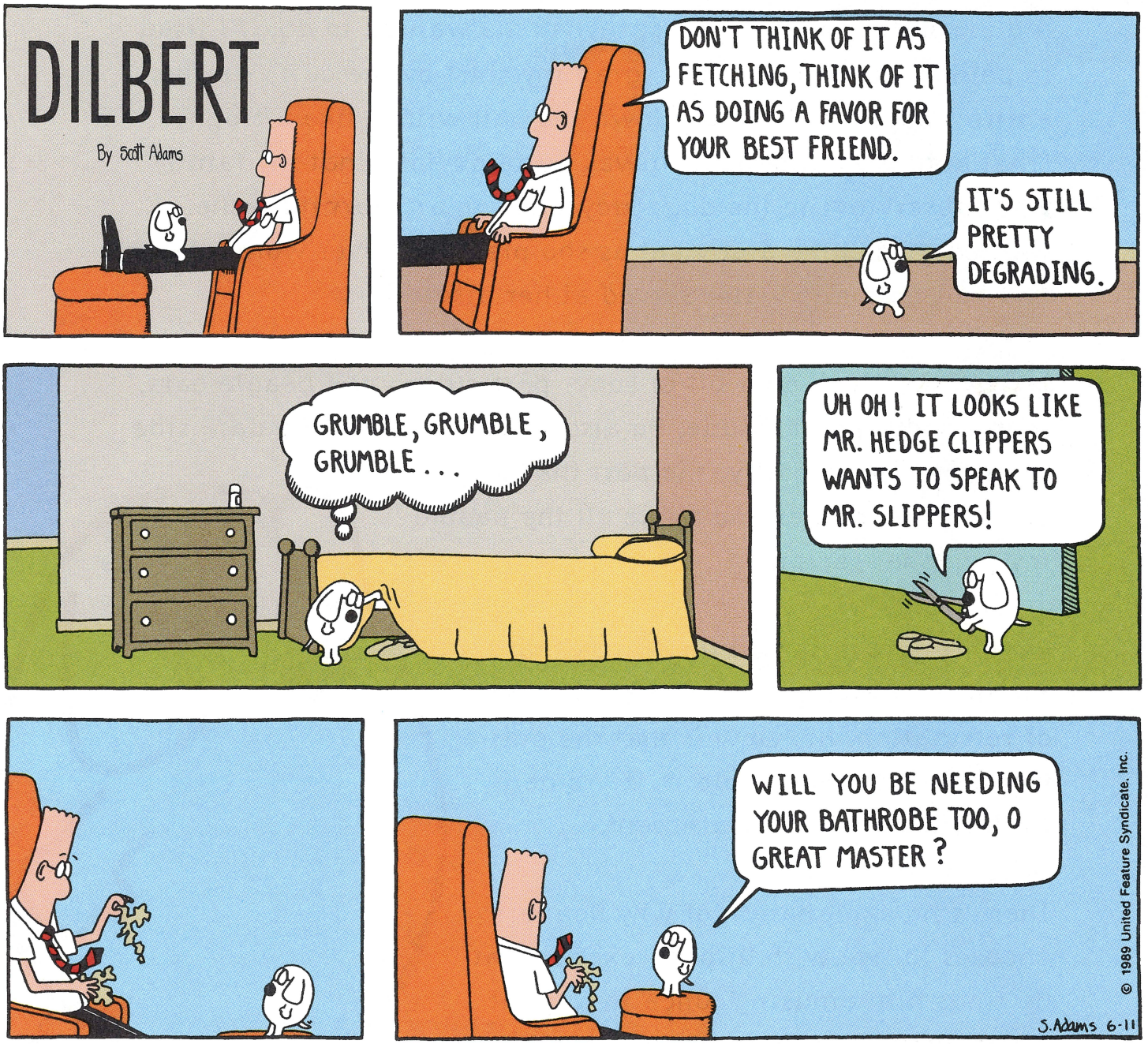
My personal experience with dogs was primarily with a beagle named Lucy, our family dog for most of my childhood. Lucy never once came when I called—not once in fourteen years. In fact, she did absolutely nothing except what she wanted to do. If I tried to pet her she would growl, grab my shirt by the cuff, rip the entire sleeve off, and run down the hall with it like a trophy. (That actually happened.) It was quite obvious that my family was subservient to the dog. Lucy slept on any furniture she wanted, she came and went as she pleased, never wore a leash, and had food and water served at her discretion.

Dogbert took on a bit of Lucy, particularly the beagle ears, round body, and attitude. He also took on a bit of the dark side of my own personality, the part that wants to conquer the planet and make all the people my personal servants.

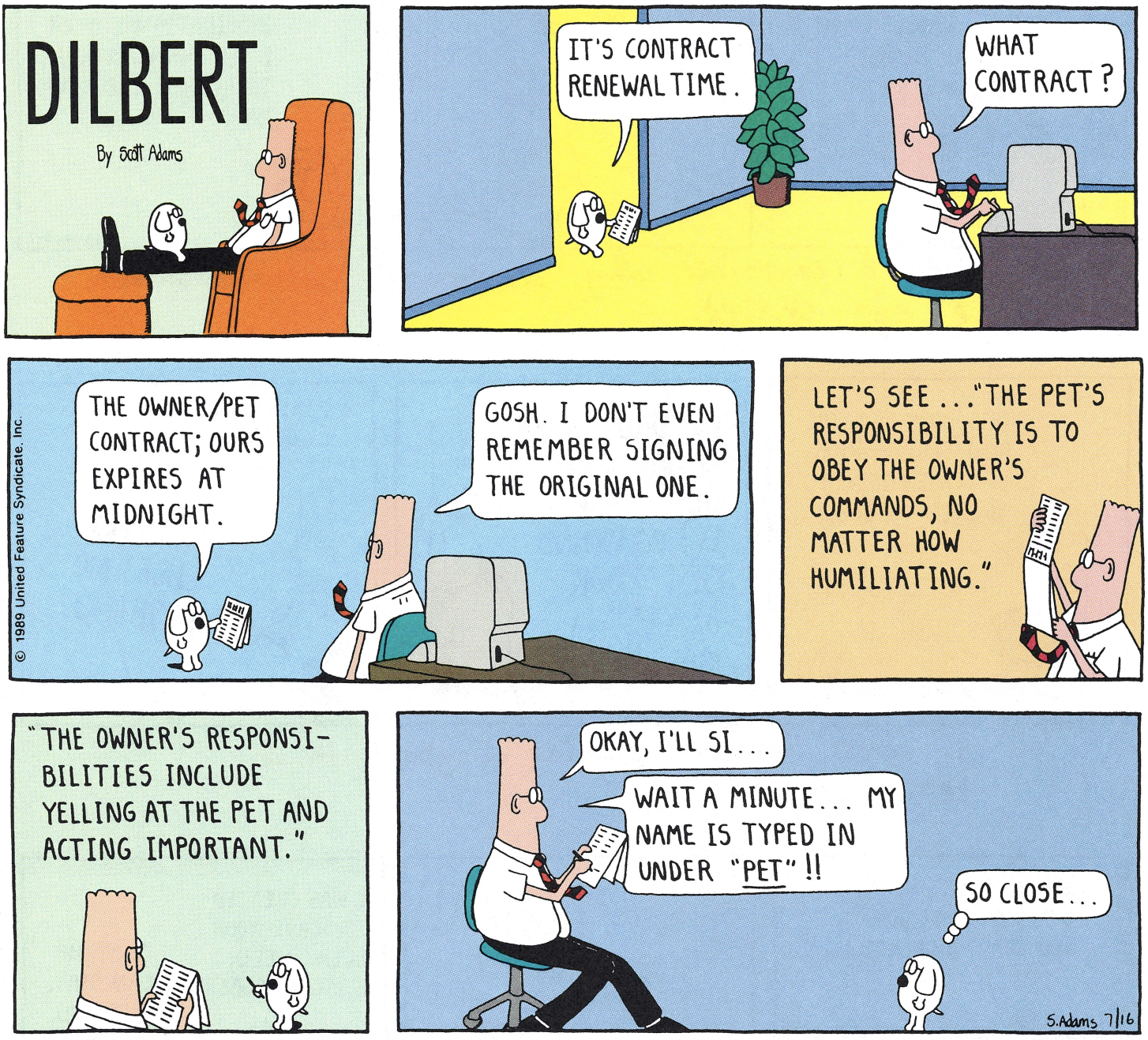
Dogbert gets to say all the things that I might be thinking but can't say for fear of retribution. His view is that the entire world and all the people in it are here for his personal entertainment.

There's no explanation of why Dogbert chooses to live with Dilbert, except that he finds him amusing. Once in a great while we'll see some glimpses of affection. And if Dilbert gets in deep trouble we can count on Dogbert to bail him out.

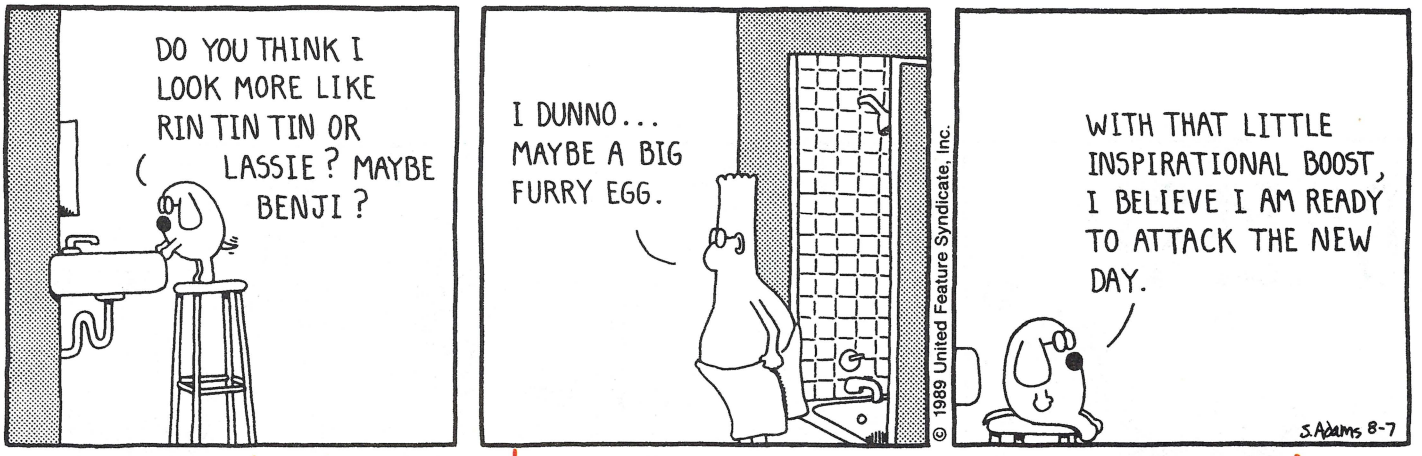
. . . the Early, Vulnerable Days



Dogbert was more of a pet in the first year.
He wasn't obedient, but he was a pet.



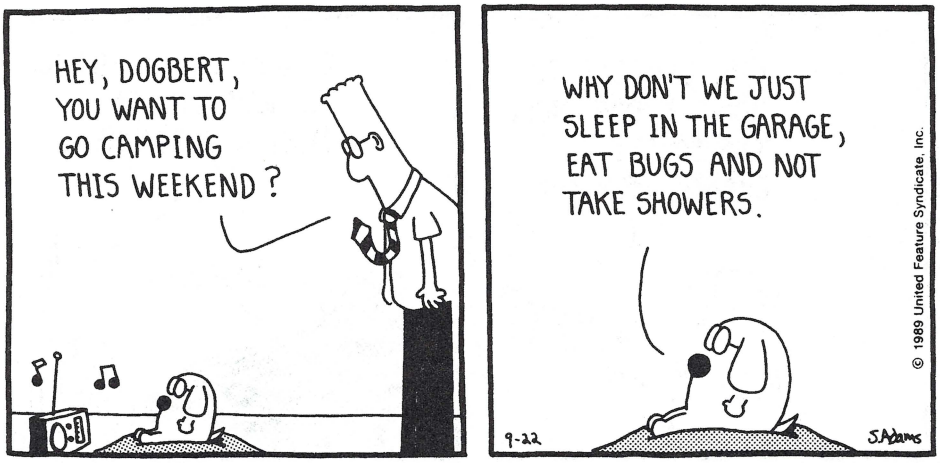
Dogbert is starting to show his true personality now.



I don't remember why I thought Dogbert should be egg-shaped.

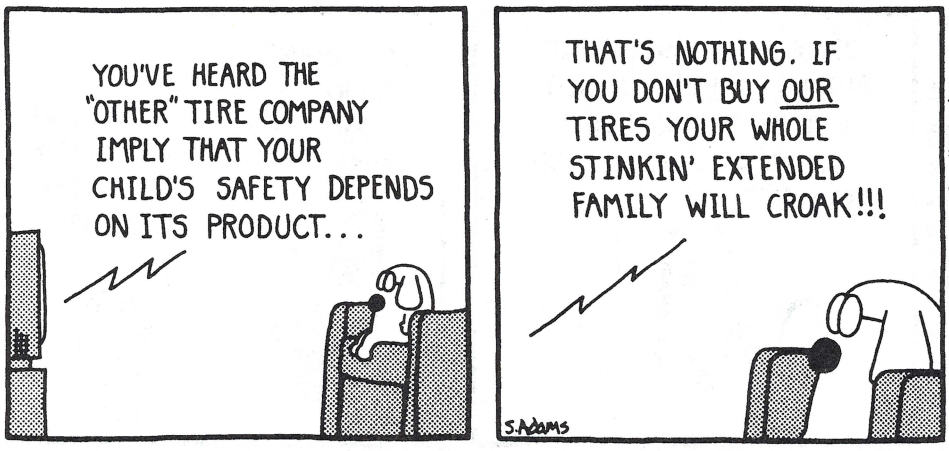
I can't imagine putting Dogbert in a leash now.

Dogbert shows emotion with fur, eyebrows, and ears.

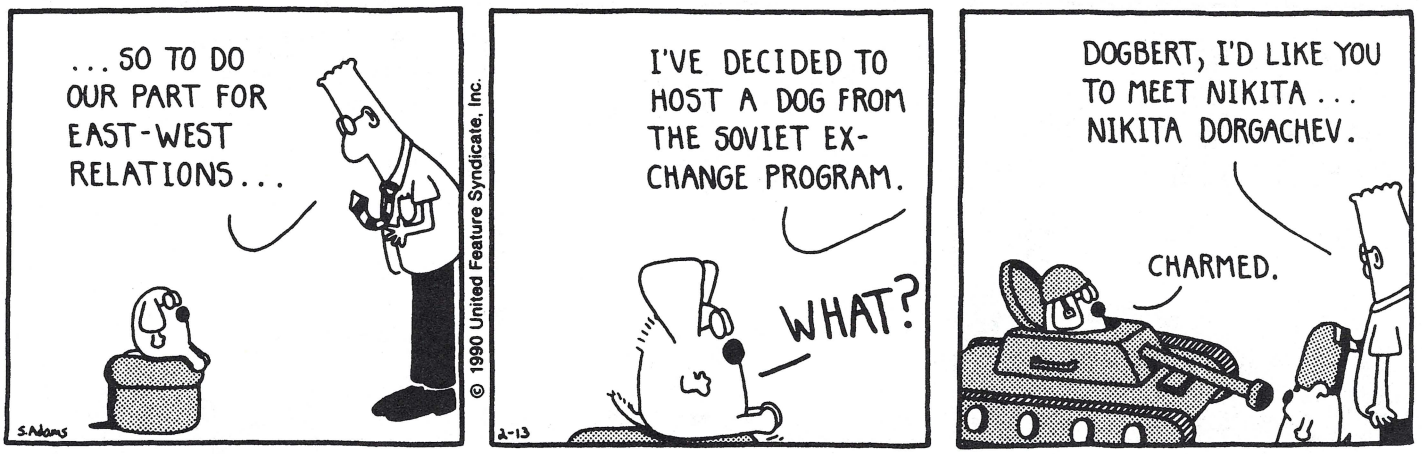


This is my view of "roughing it," as expressed by Dogbert.

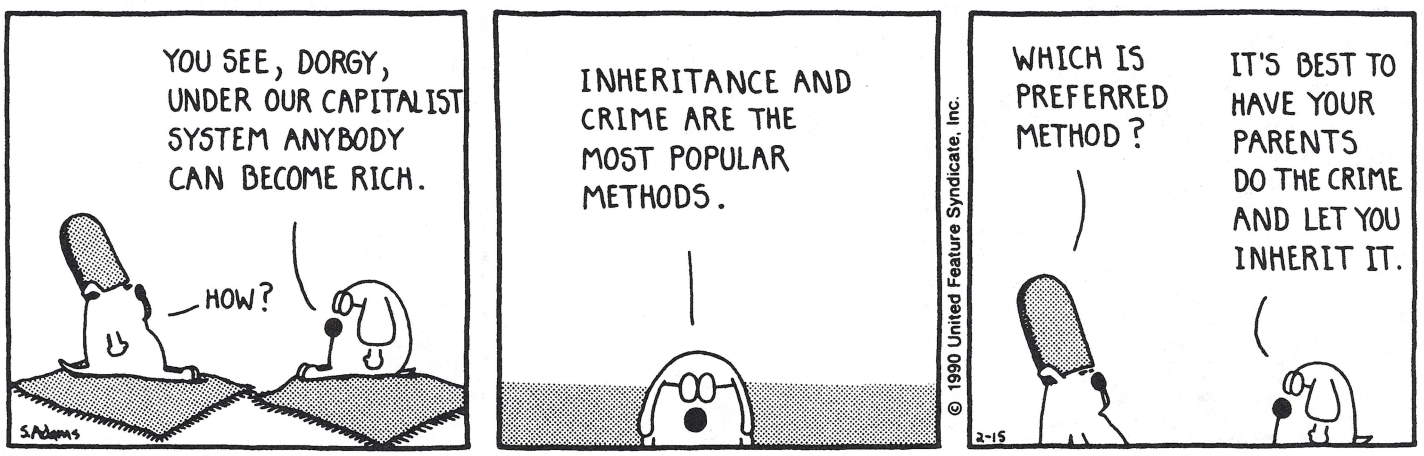
Here I was still playing with dog stereotypes. No dogs complained.



He's too cute when his ears fly up.

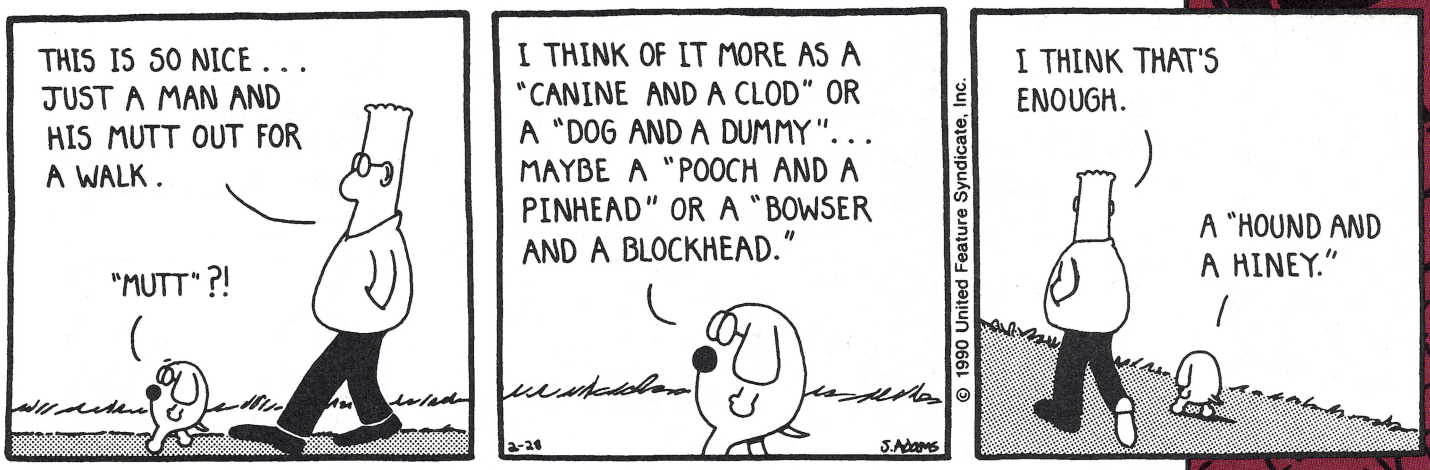


Dogbert begins to get political. Or maybe it was just an excuse to show what dogs look like with hats.



Have you ever noticed how many wealthy industrialists started out by doing illegal things? I'd love to see some statistics on that. And more dogs with hats.

Personally, I love capitalism, but it's a great subject for humor because it creates losers more often than winners. (I've been both.)



If a human had spoken the word "hiney," I probably wouldn't have gotten away with it.

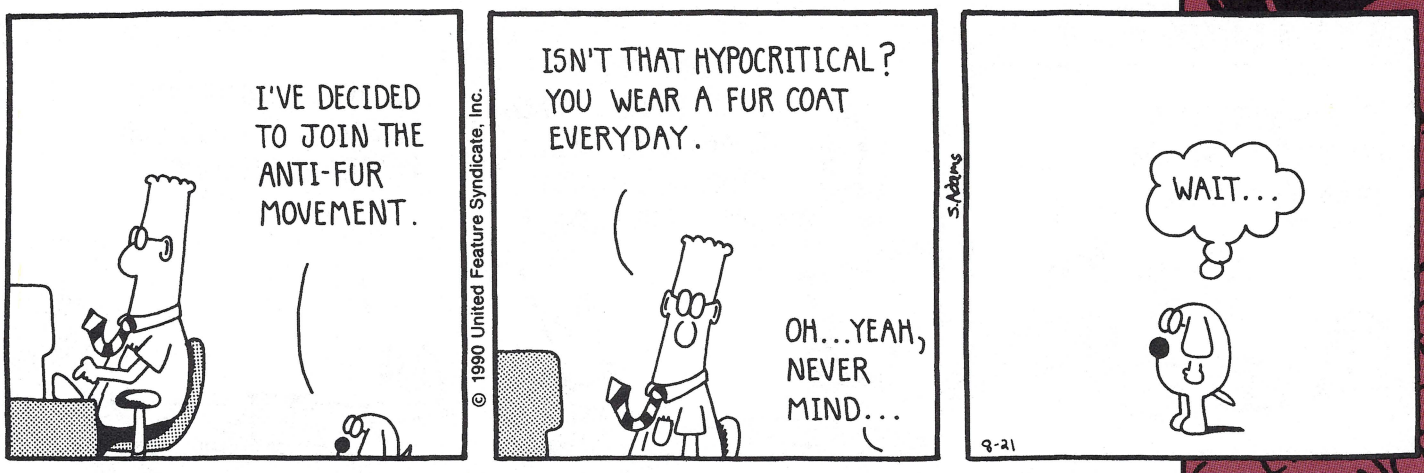
I always feel sorry for dogs who catch "Frisbees." It looks humiliating.

This might be the world's first gay dog cartoon.

Dogbert continues to get more assertive and clever.

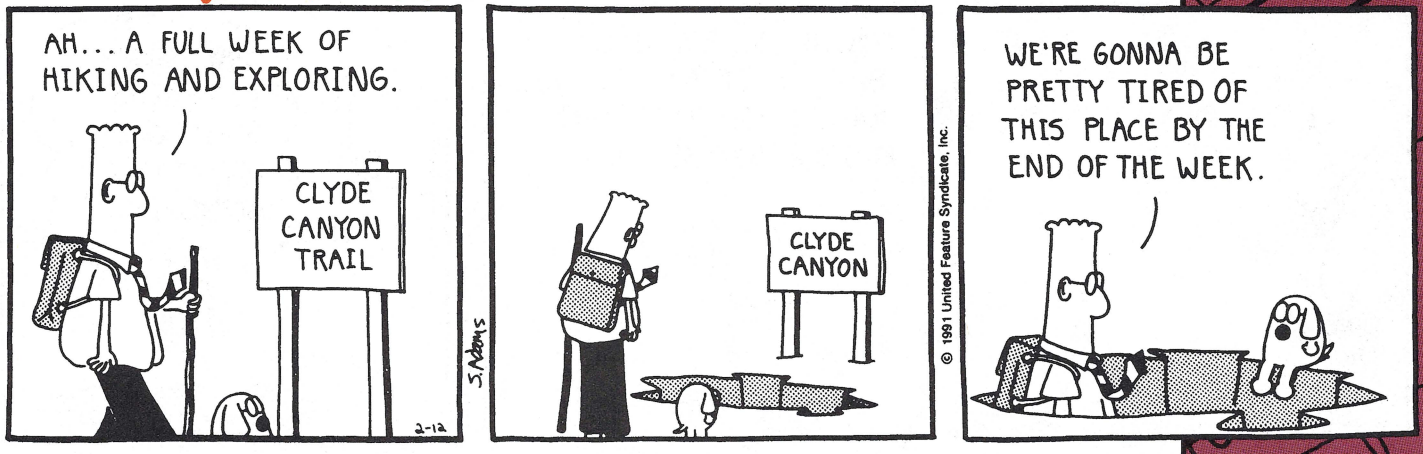
Debris is hard to draw.

It would explain everything.

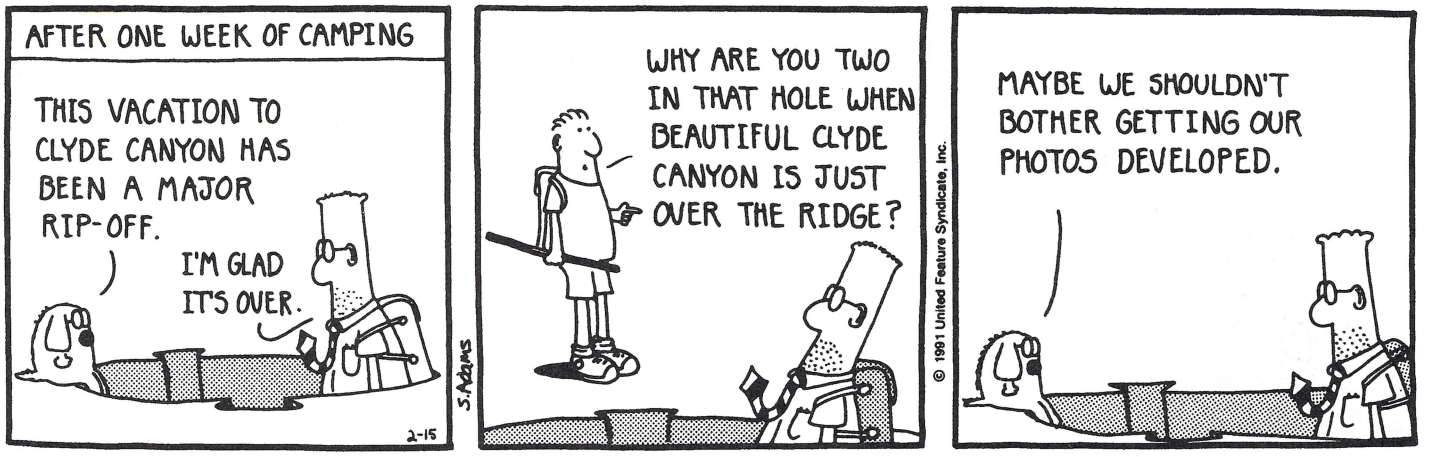


Most issues are not black and white. I'm suspicious of anyone who has a firm belief about anything.

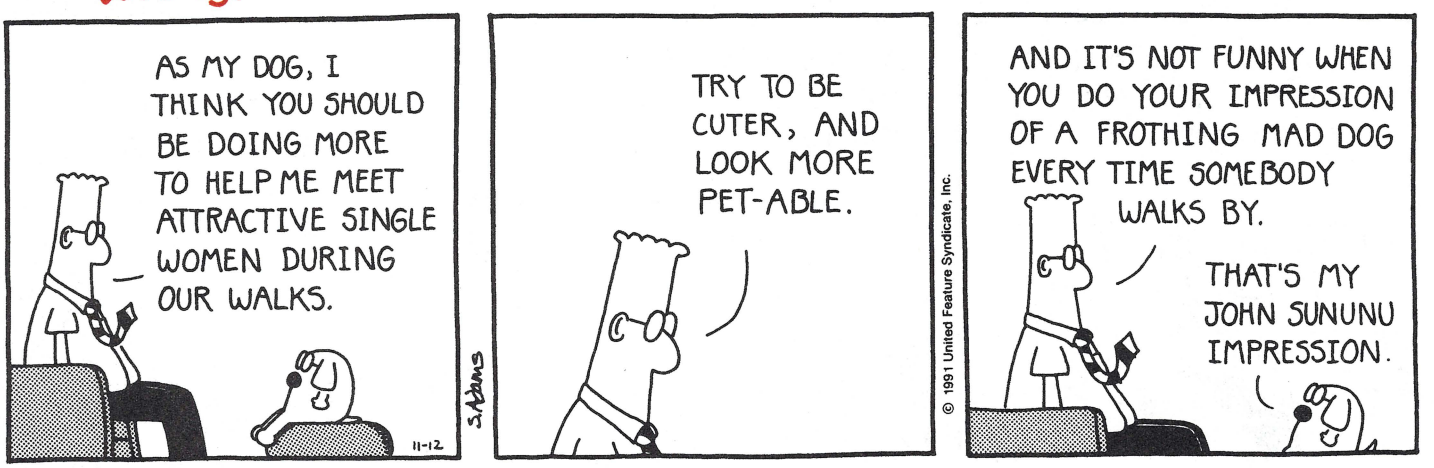
This is another reason Dogbert doesn't respect humans. He wouldn't put up with this now.



To me, all vacations look like this — a long hike to something that looks better in the brochure.



There's an art to taking vacations — an art I'm not good at. I always think I must be doing something wrong.



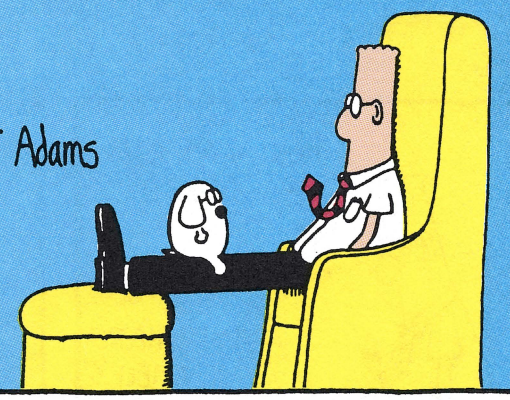
Dogbert's joy of taunting Dilbert is getting more developed now.

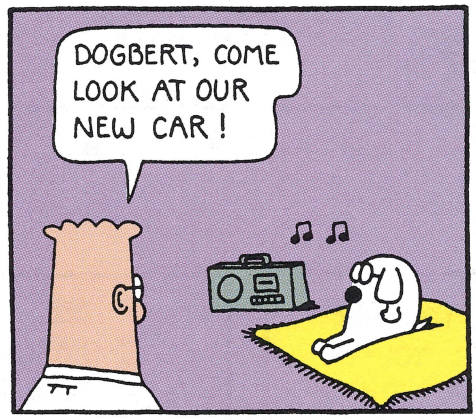
I wrote this in 1991. This month is the first time you can get a PCS phone in my area.

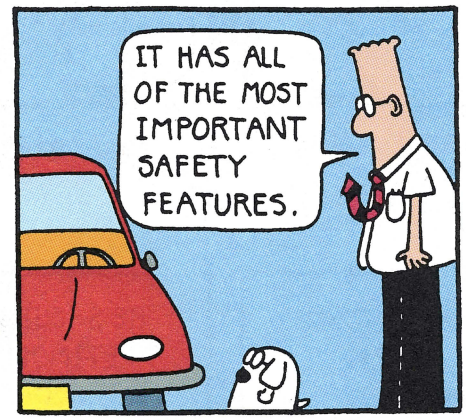
I had a big green pillow like this. It was great for watching TV on the floor.

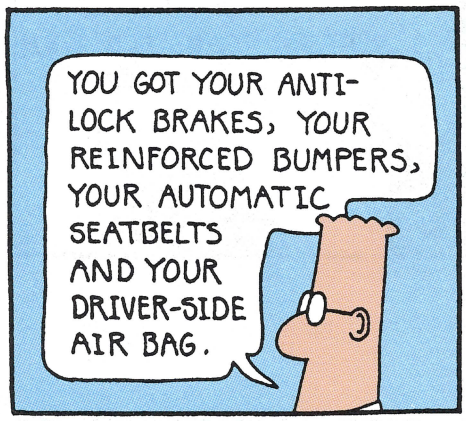
DILBERT

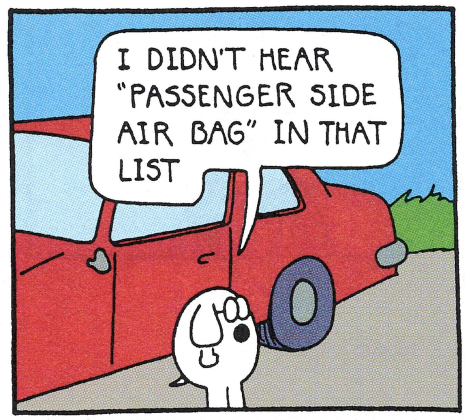
By Scott Adams

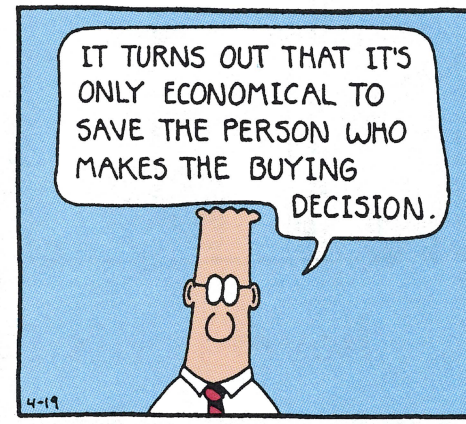


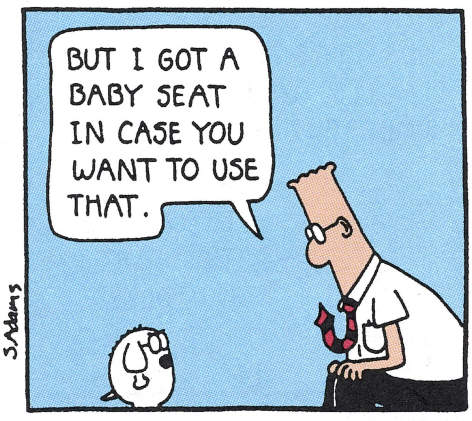


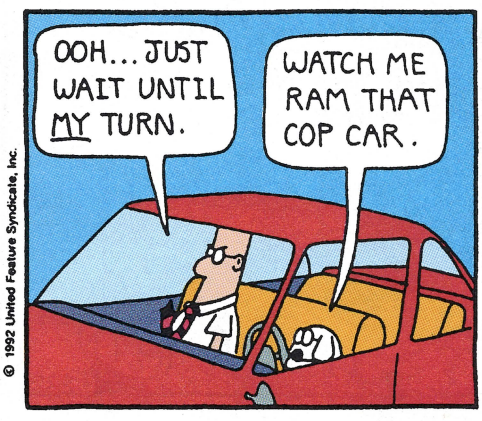












My girlfriend complained about the lack of an airbag on her side.

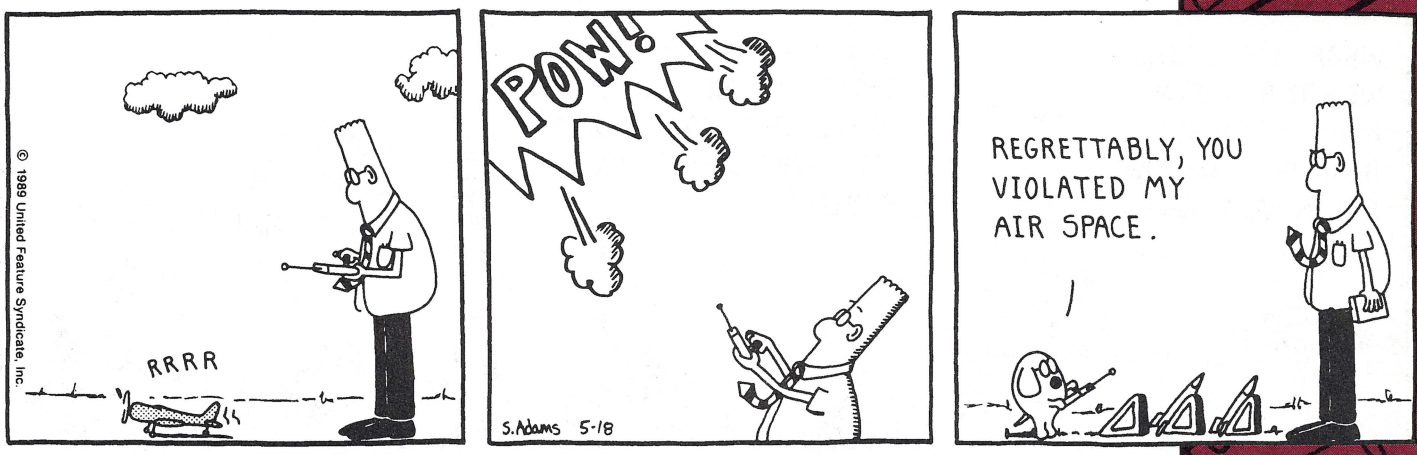
In small ways, I revealed that Dilbert and Dogbert liked each other.

. . . Reveals His Sarcasm

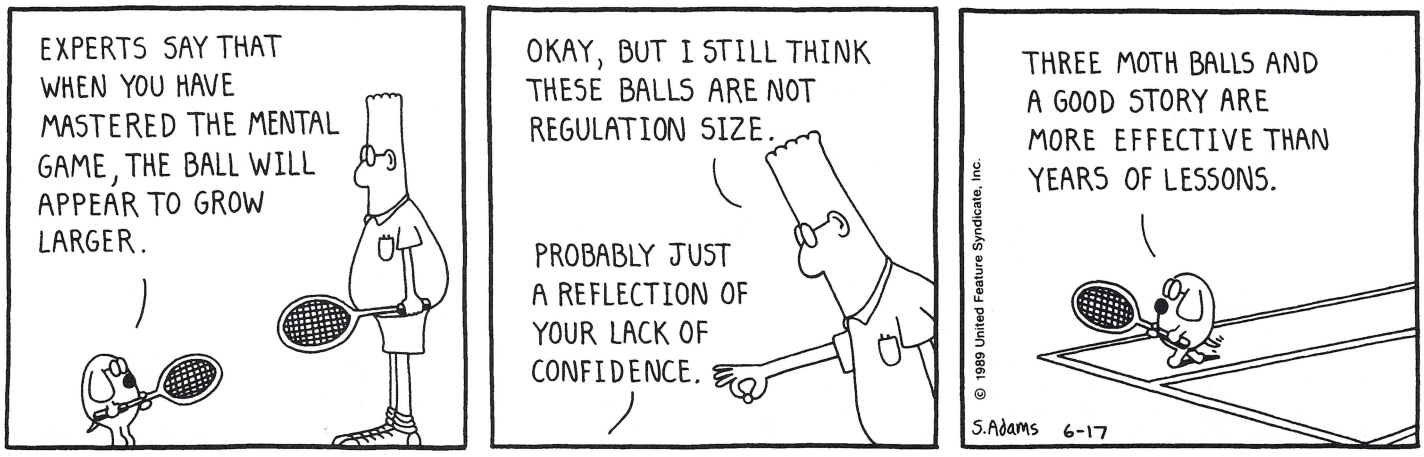
If you ask me, tuxedos have too many unnecessary parts.

The art of time management is really the ability to blow people off without guilt.

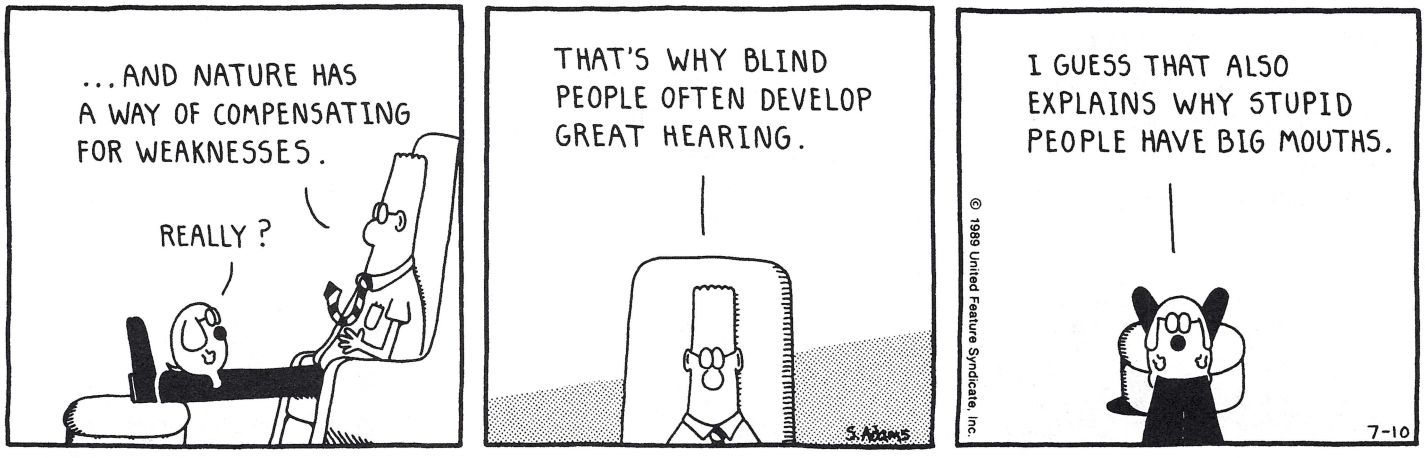
Here's a glimpse of Dogbert's growth into more human preferences.



These would be fun toys.



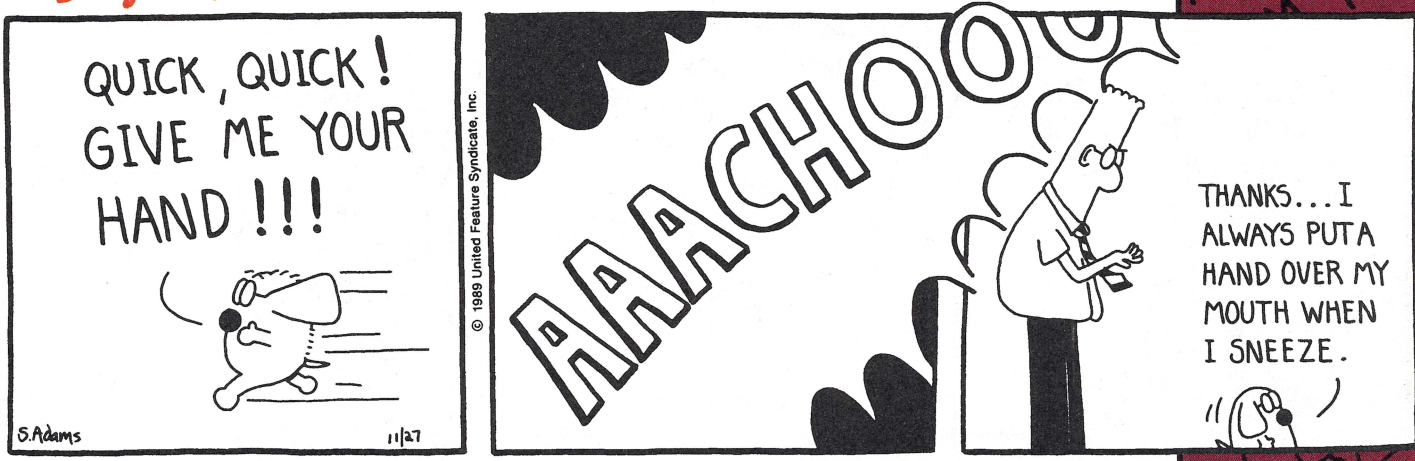
Dogbert increasingly comes out on top by having no ethical limitations.



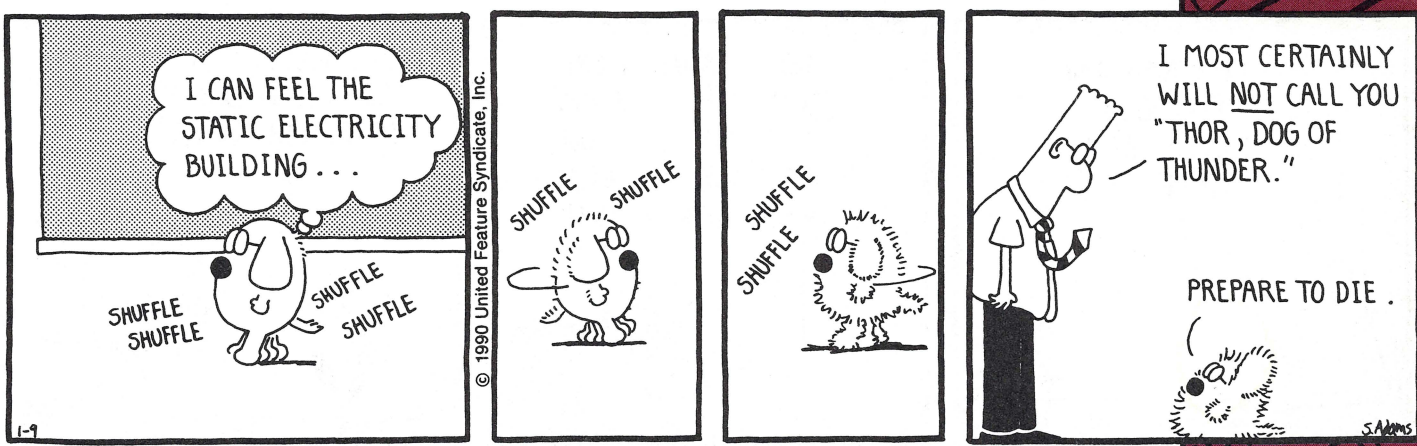
My cat sits on my legs like that.

I have a friend who was a bird watcher. They're very competitive.

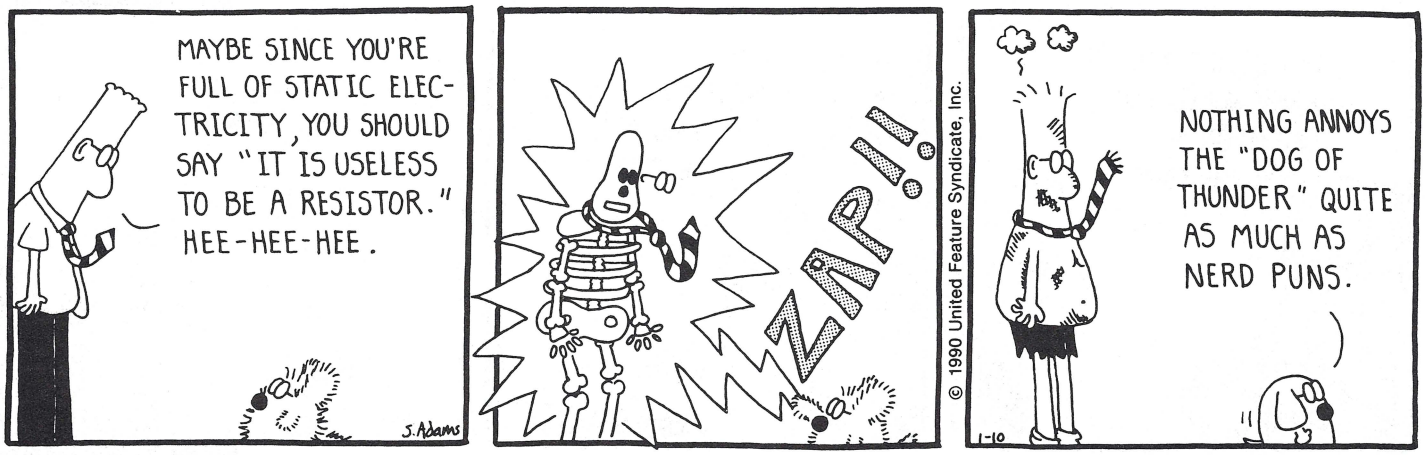
In 1989, I only owned one piece of new furniture. It was the green recliner chair Dogbert is in.



My cat sneezes on me intentionally.

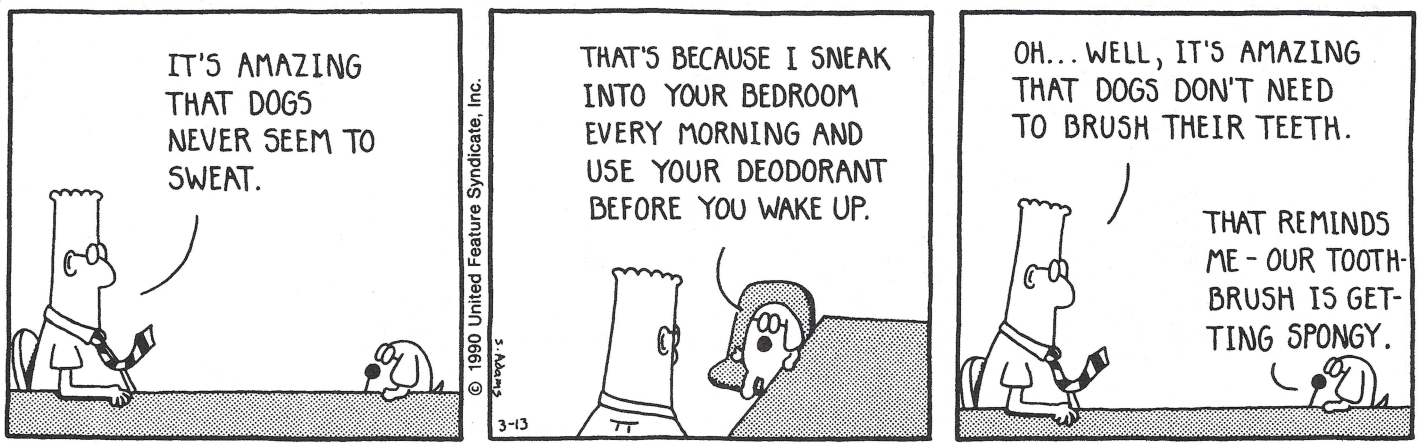


Thor was one of my favorite comics as a kid.



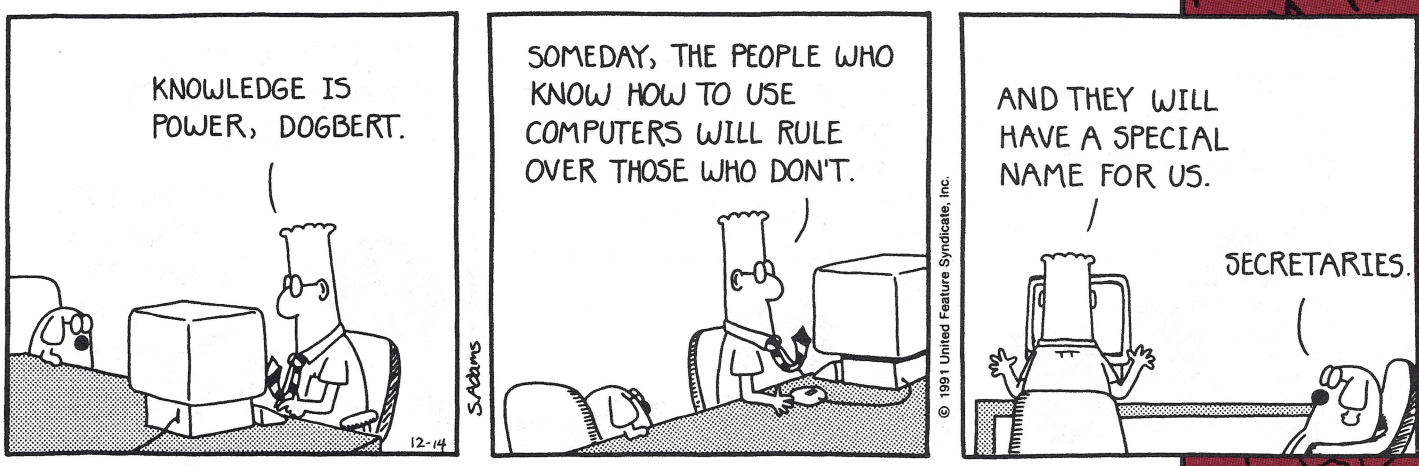
A lot of people don't have the capacitor for appreciating nerd puns.

I was a contestant on "Wheel of Fortune"... and lost.

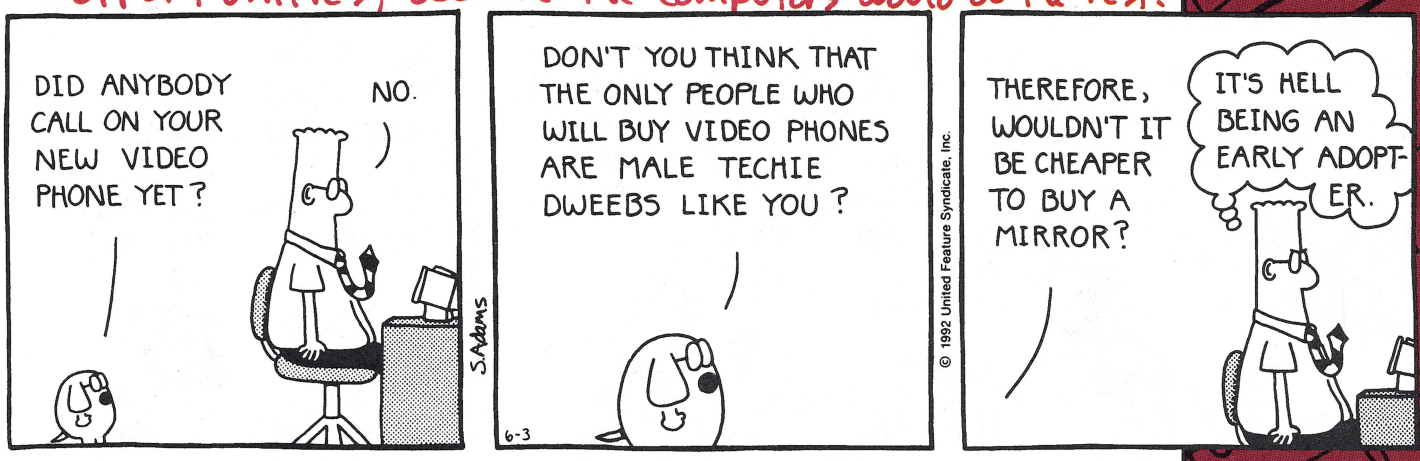


Why don't dogs get cavities? What's up with that?

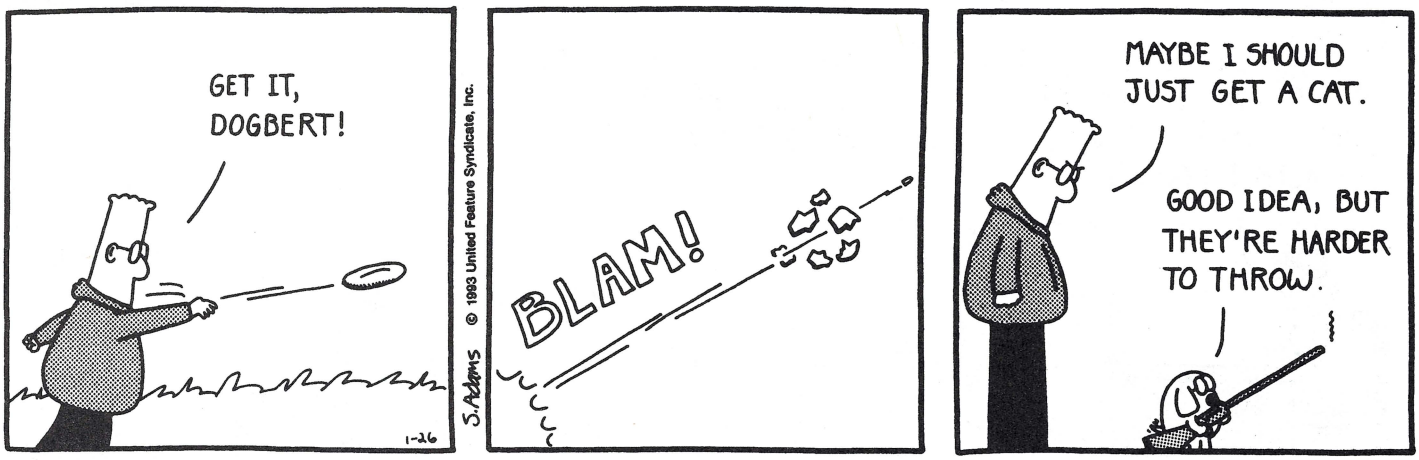
when I worked in a bank, we hated the rich customers.



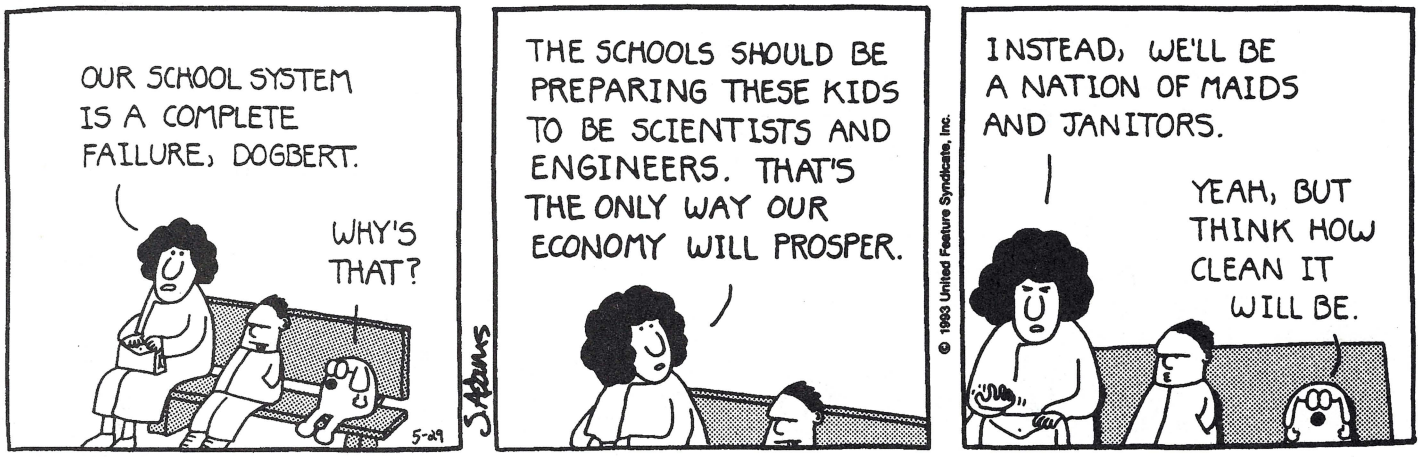
I had a neighbor who believed that computer skills would lead to nothing but clerical opportunities, because the computers would do the rest.



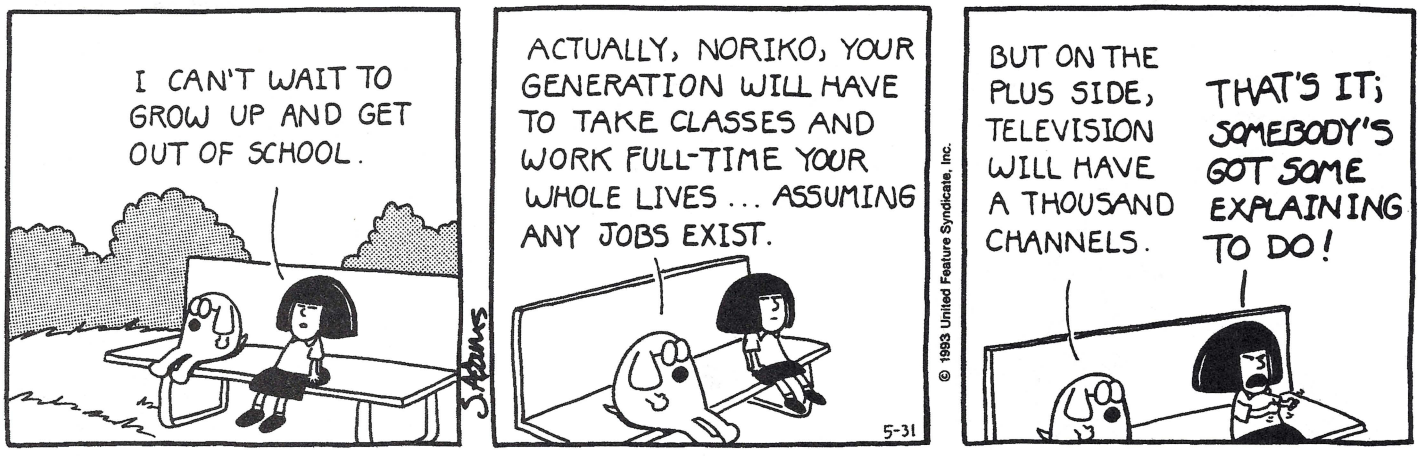
I think this about Internet "chats" too.



Dogbert's views on the "Frisbee" concept are becoming clearer.

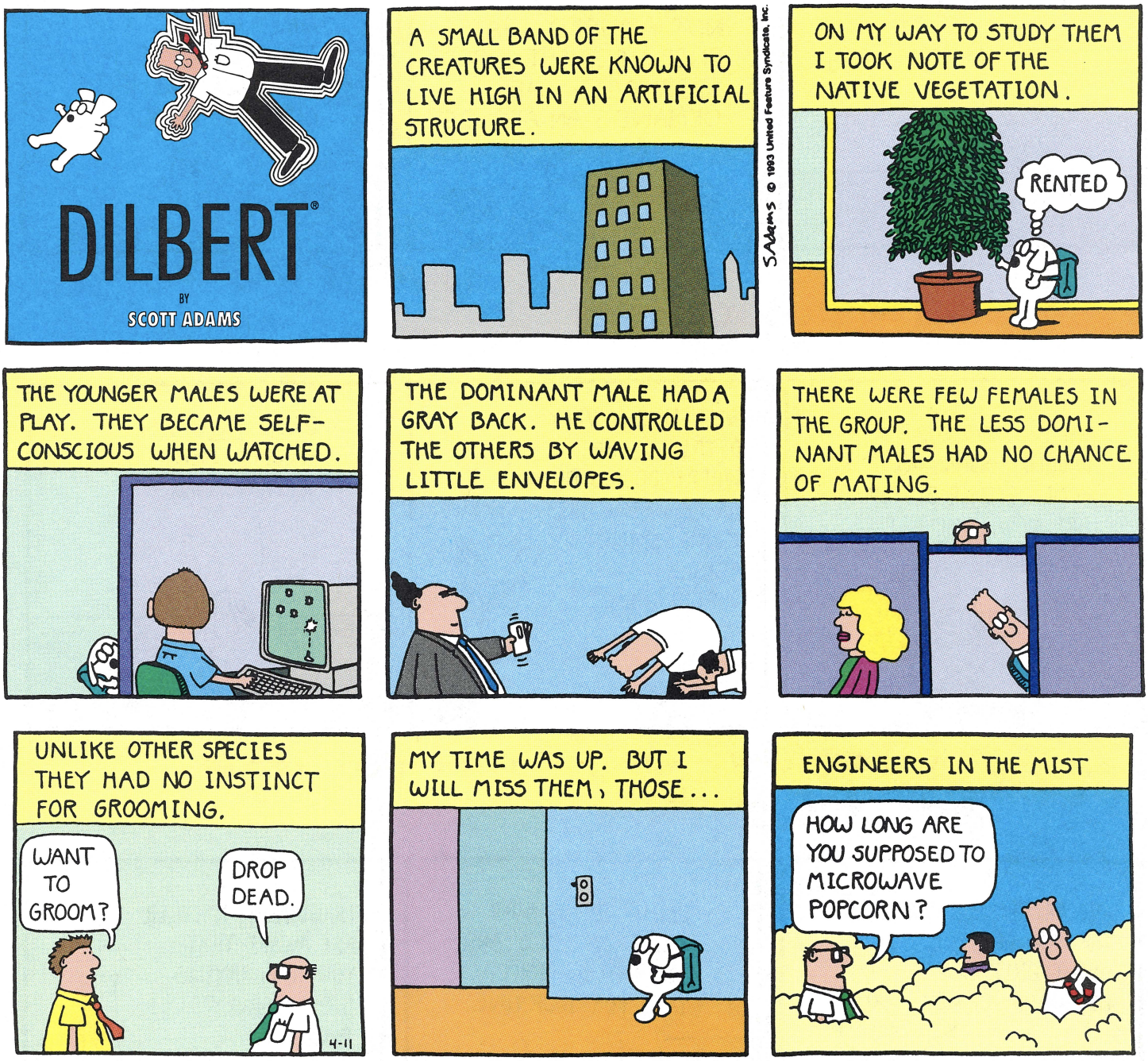


I think every story has a positive side. But I got complaints from maids and janitors after this ran.

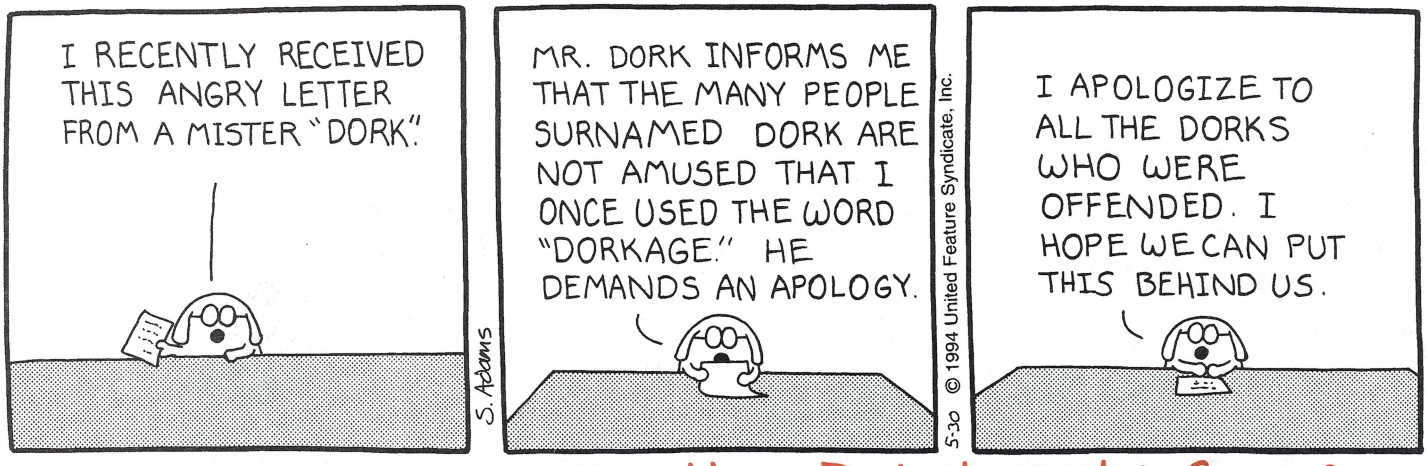


Noriko is my girlfriend's middle name. This character is based on a kindergarten

picture of her I saw.

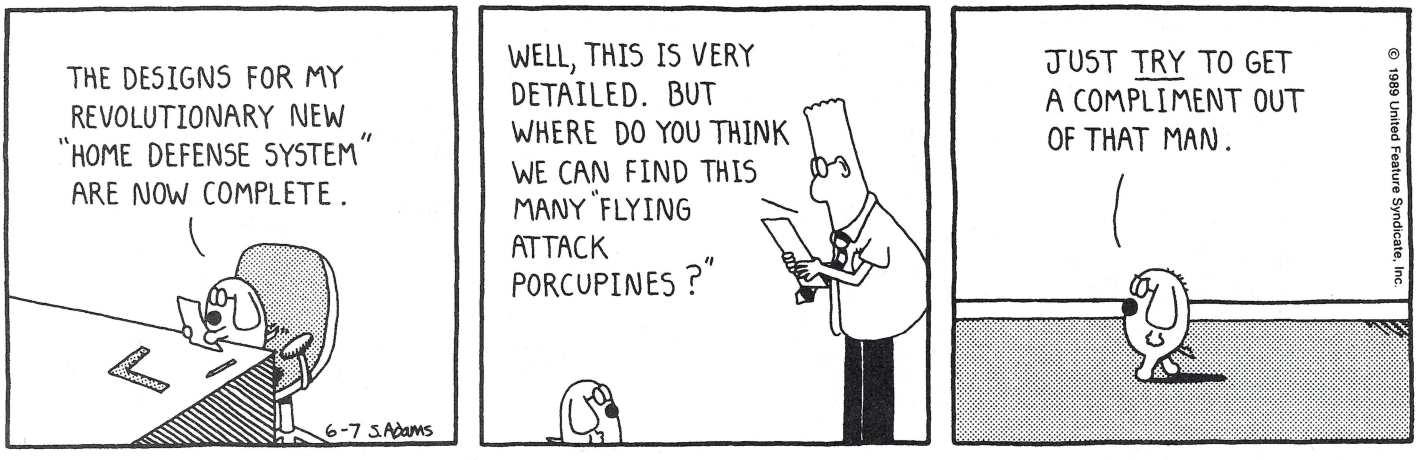


I felt like an observer in the land of engineers at Pacific Bell. I wasn't an engineer by training, but I worked closely with them.



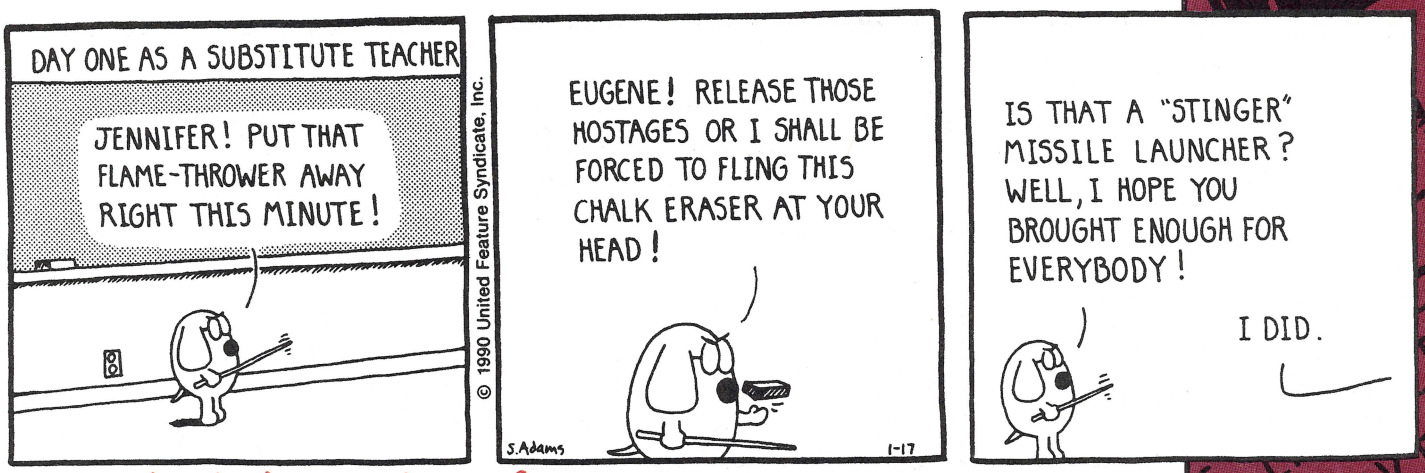
Sometimes Dogbert speaks for me.

. . . the Many Occupations

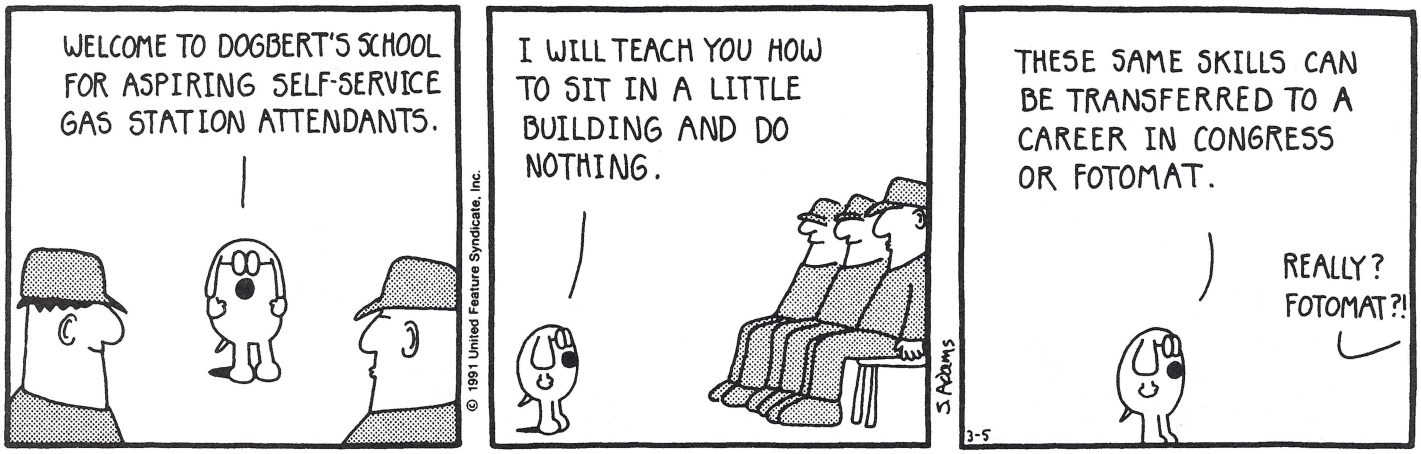


My best ideas are the ones that people hate the most.

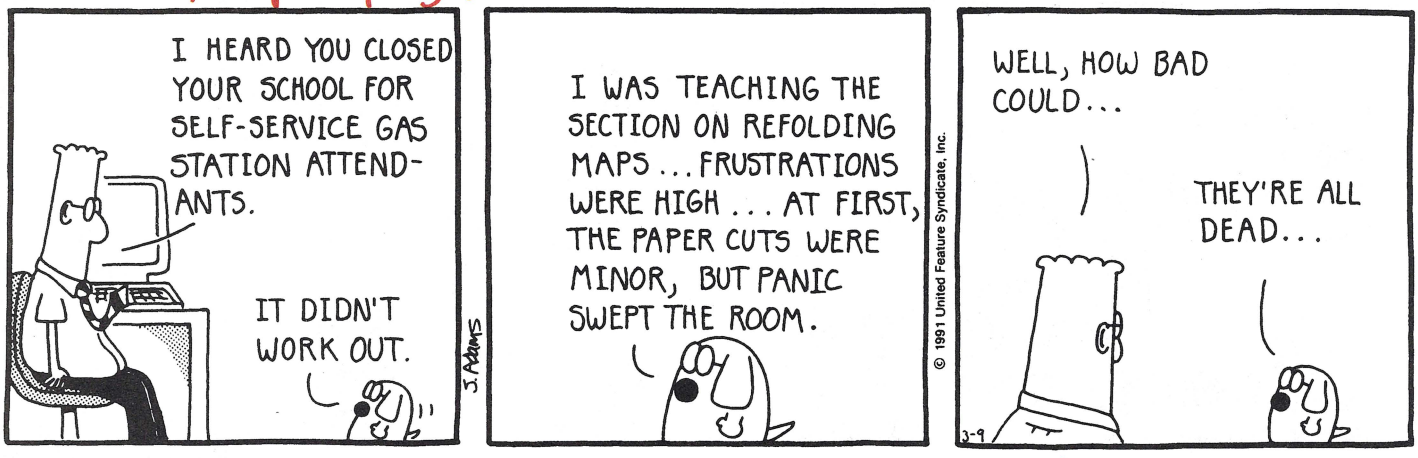
Dogbert used a "Macintosh" in those days.



Dogbert is perfect for exploring the downsides of other occupations because he brings a surreal element to surreal situations.



There actually are schools for self-service gas station attendants. You probably fail if you try to pump gas.



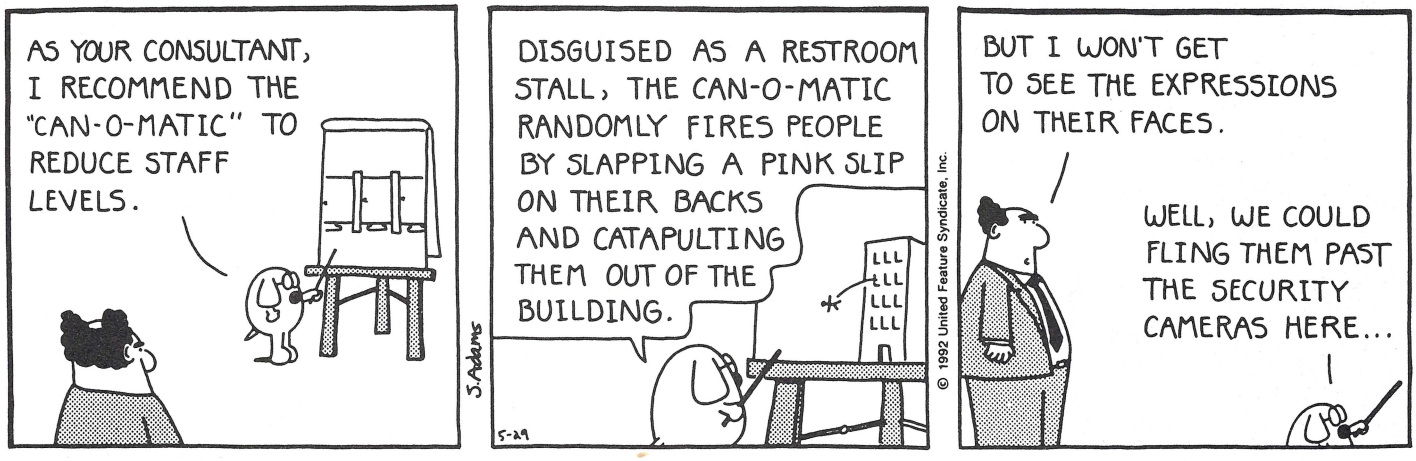
I wanted to end this series, so I killed all the extras.

Dogbert would be the perfect used car salesman.

The spokespeople for tobacco companies always look half dead. The Surgeon General should make them put their pictures on every pack.

I can't draw caricatures, so I hide them behind chairs if they're real people.

This was during the Clarence Thomas senate confirmation process.

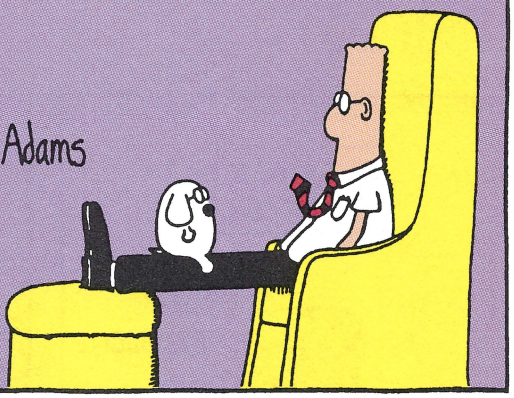


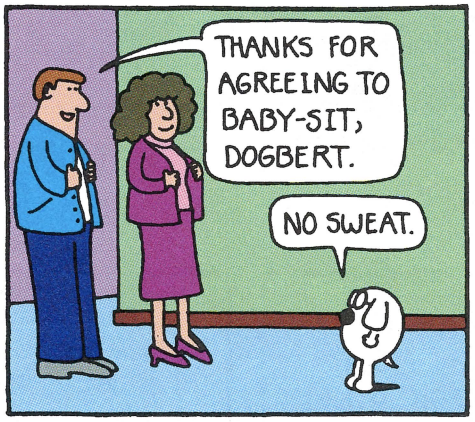
Dogbert ventures into the consulting field. He'll be there a lot.

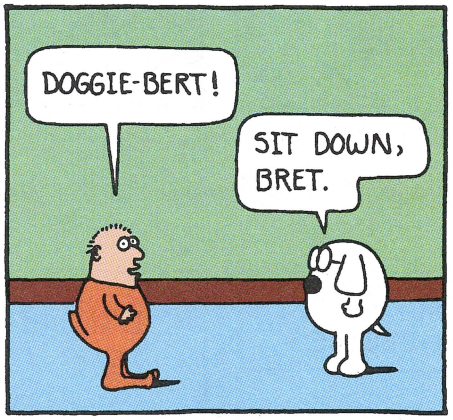
↑ sometimes spelled "AAARGH!"

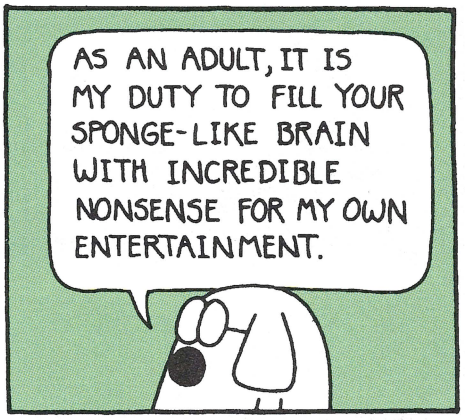
DILBERT

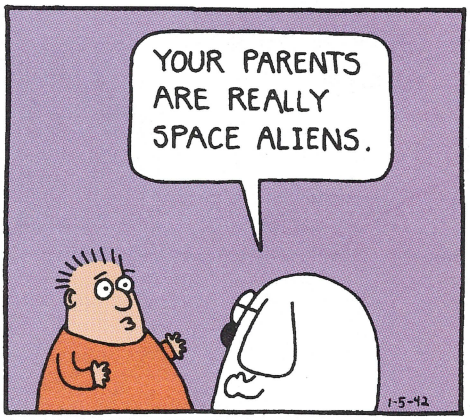
By Scott Adams

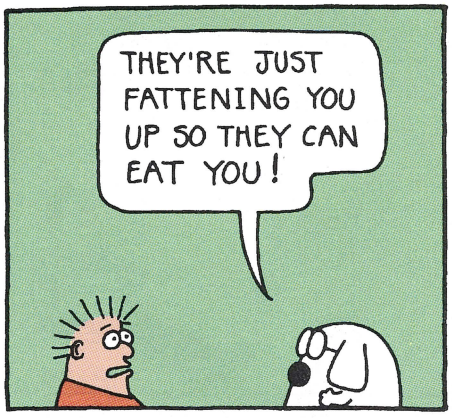


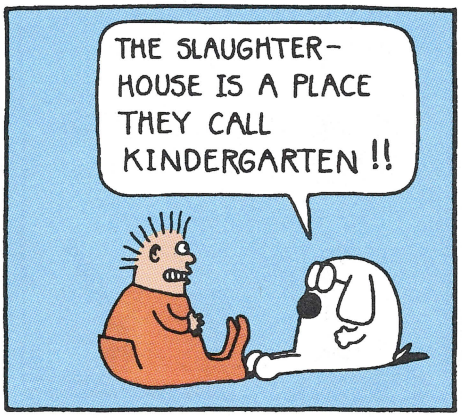


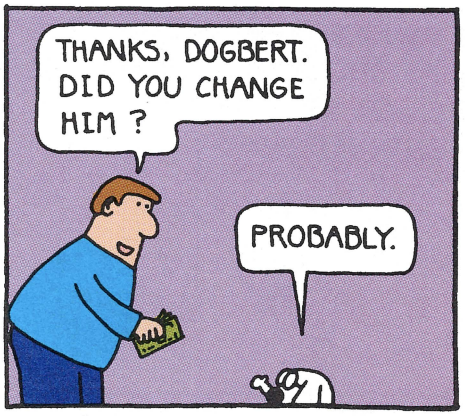








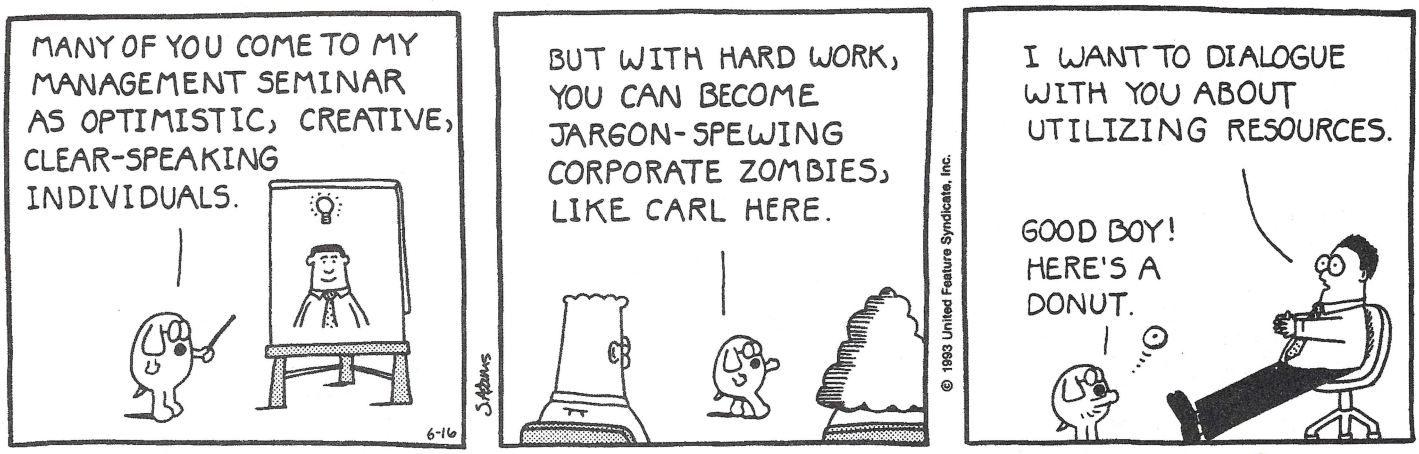




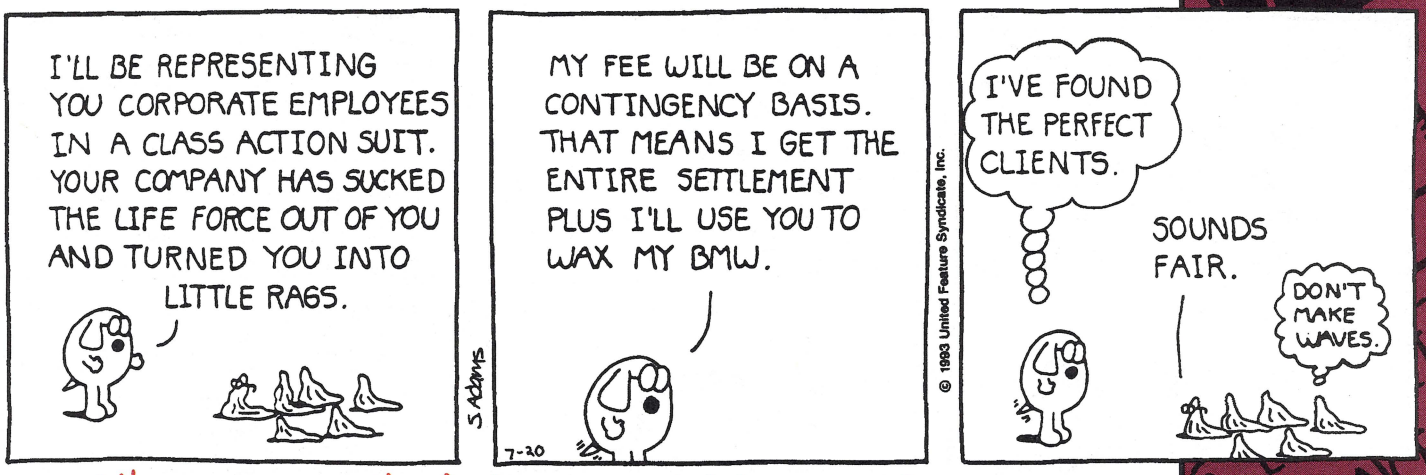
Adams © 1991 United Feature Syndicate, Inc.

My babies look like old men.

I tend to think communication causes more problems than it solves.



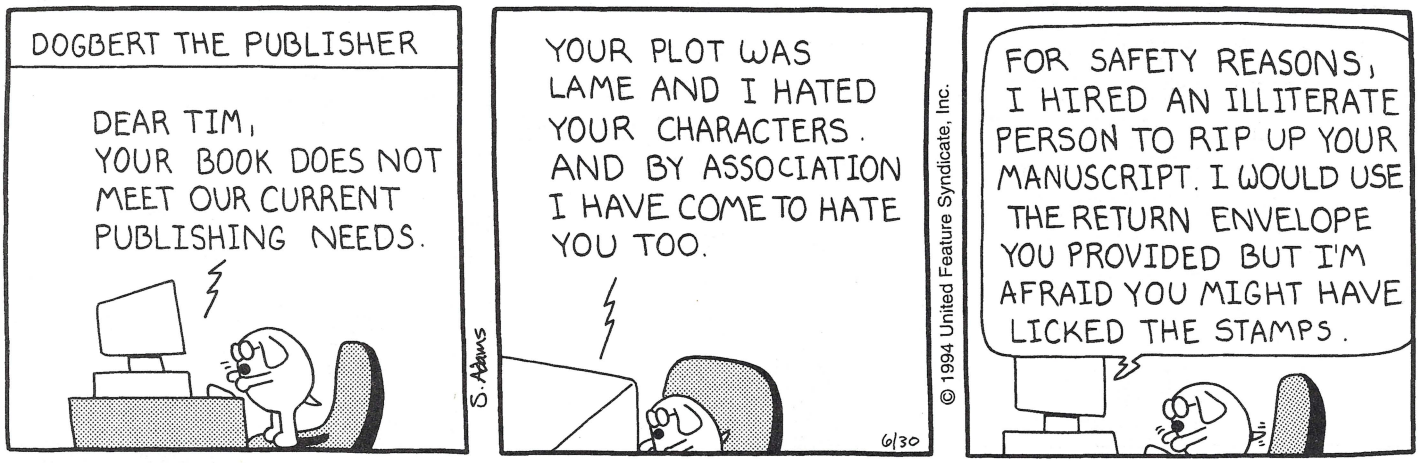
If you don't work for a big company, you don't know how accurate the dialogue is.



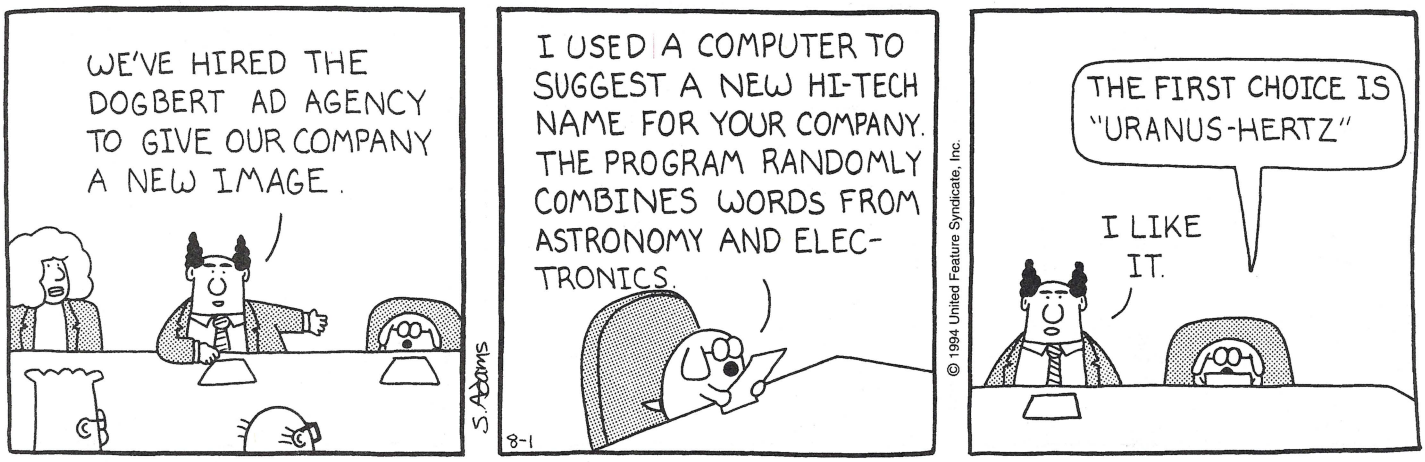
When I worked in a cubicle, I felt like a little rag.

The more selfish and mean that Dogbert is, the funnier he is.

People tell me they like it when Dogbert wags.

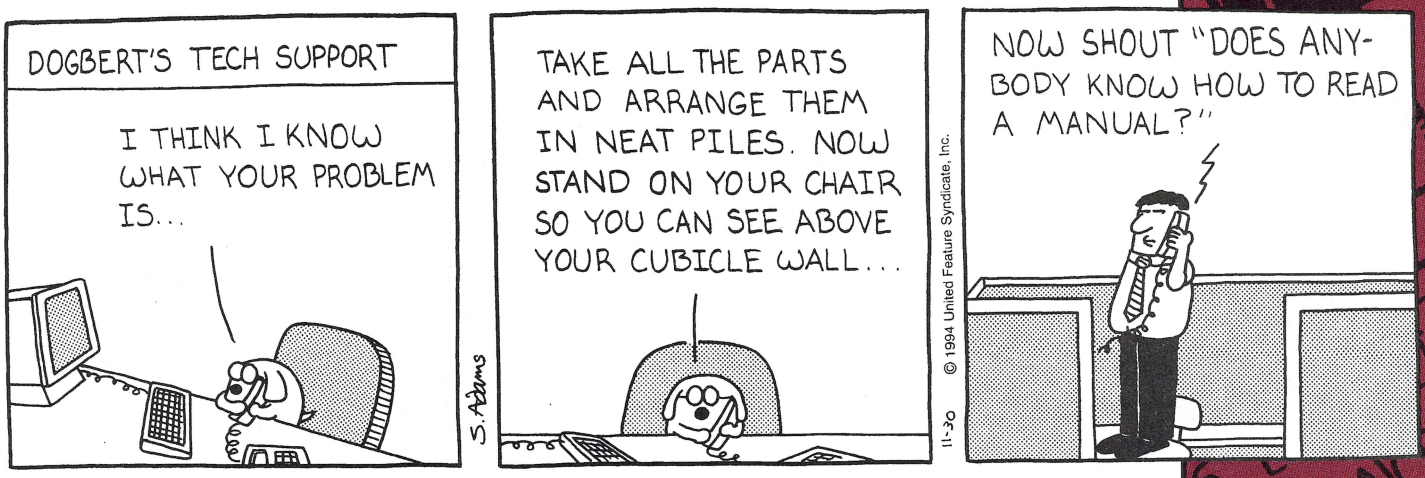


I knew a guy named Tim who was rudely turned down by a publisher.



This was banned from at least one newspaper.

Does anyone believe the concept of corporate confidentiality?

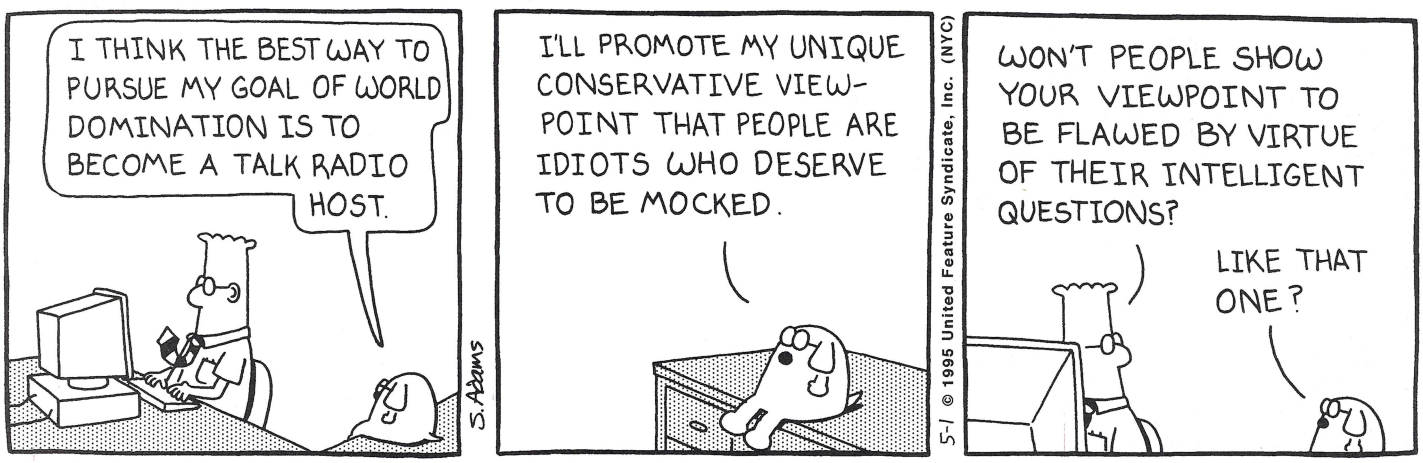


This was a big hit with tech support people. (They despise callers.)

This is my motto.

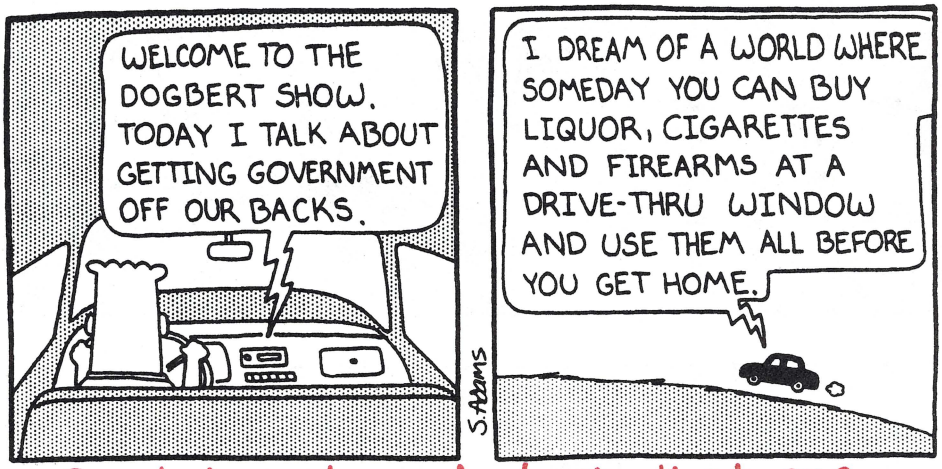
It could happen.

Sad, but often true.



Rush Limbaugh's fans attacked me for this. But Rush wasn't my target. I just thought it would be a good job for Dogbert.

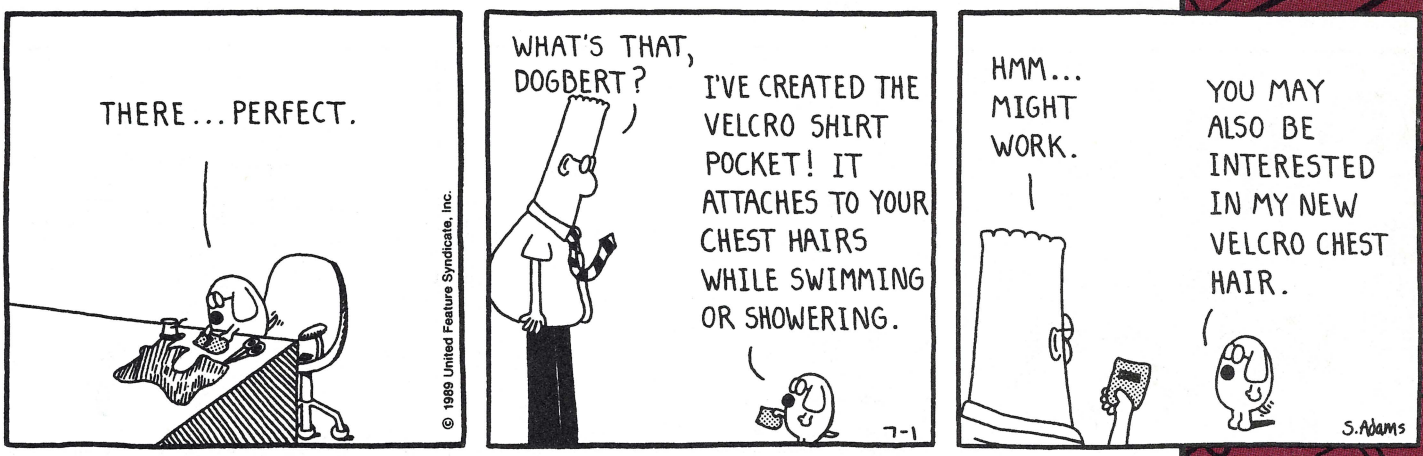
People get mad when they think Dogbert's opinions are my opinions. Sometimes →110→ they are, but usually not.



Everybody got mad about that one.

. . . Schemes to Conquer the World

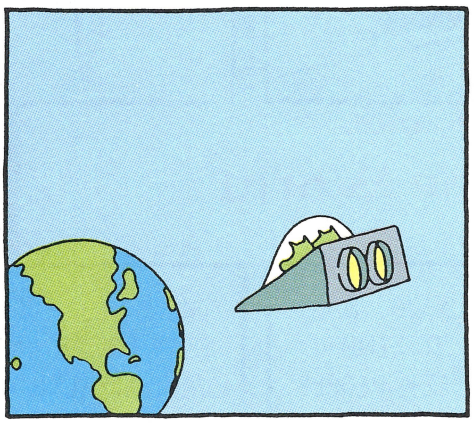
Someday I expect Dogbert to conquer the world.

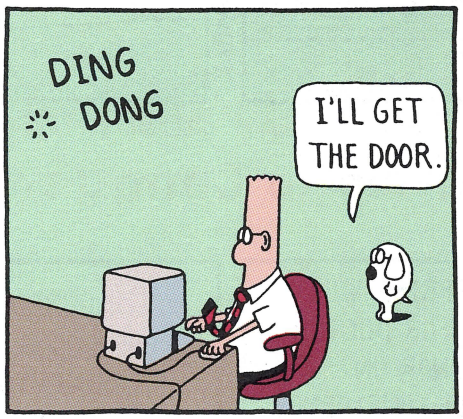


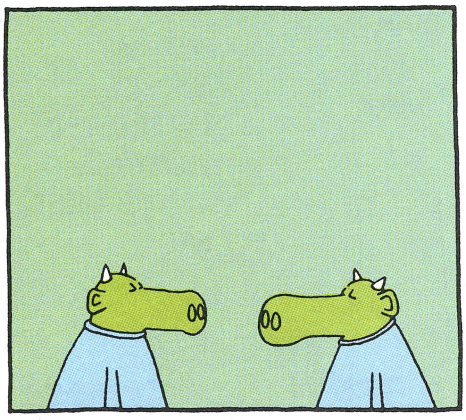
I'm a wanna-be inventor. I'm still working on my perpetual motion machine. Ironically, I can't seem to stop.

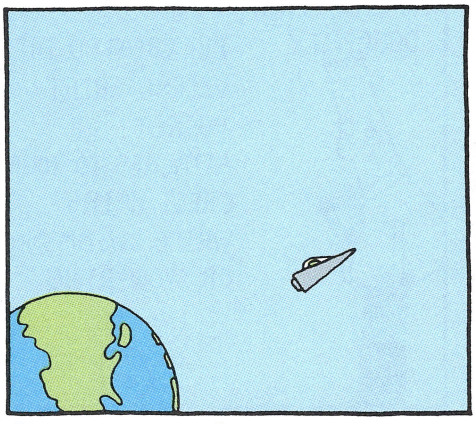
DILBERT®

By Scott Adams

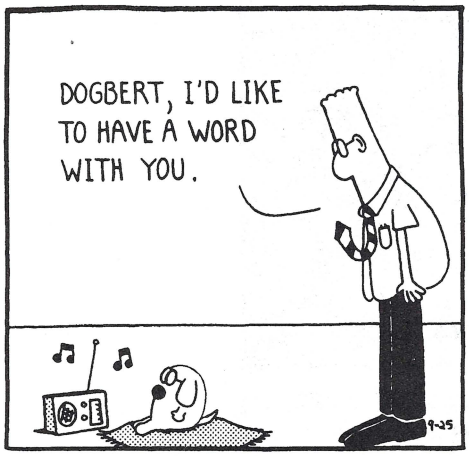


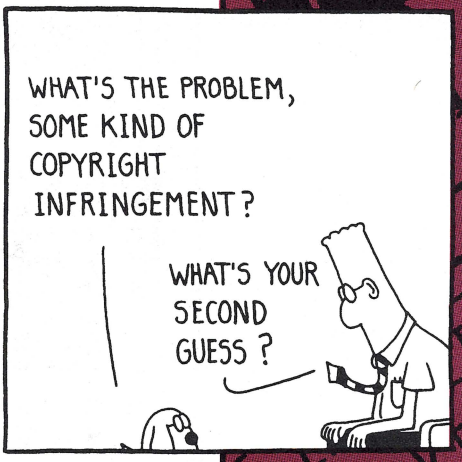




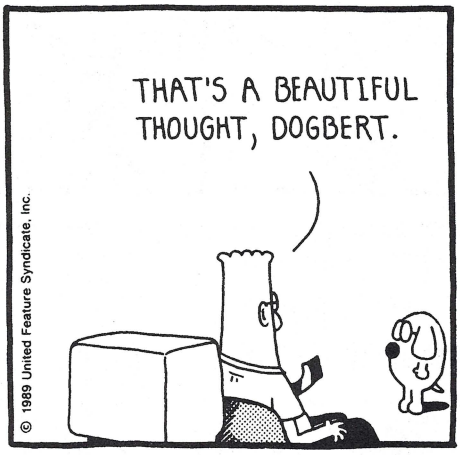


Imagine an advanced race of aliens who talk to the average human; Do you think they'll be impressed?

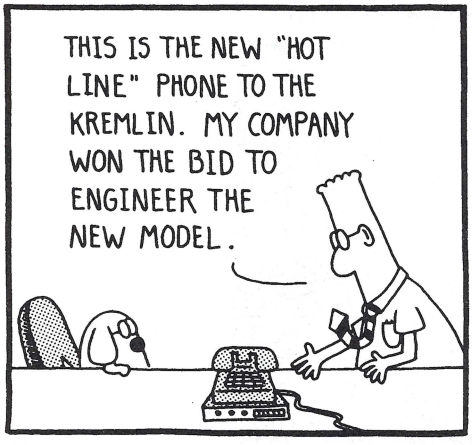


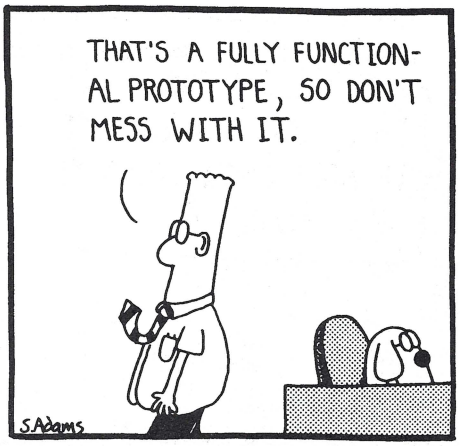


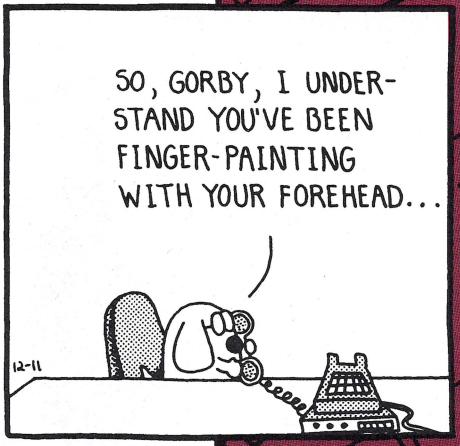
Jim Davis, the author of "Garfield" asked for the original of this. I traded for one of his. At the time, it was my biggest economic gain as a cartoonist.



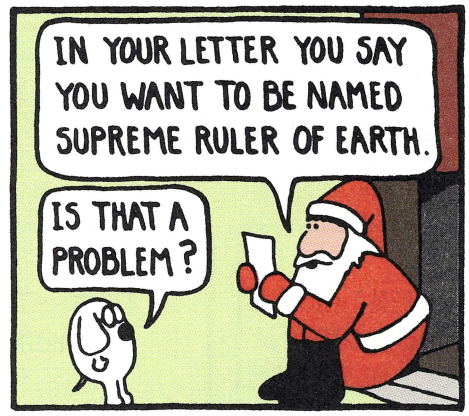
This cartoon captures the Dogbert attitude better than any other.







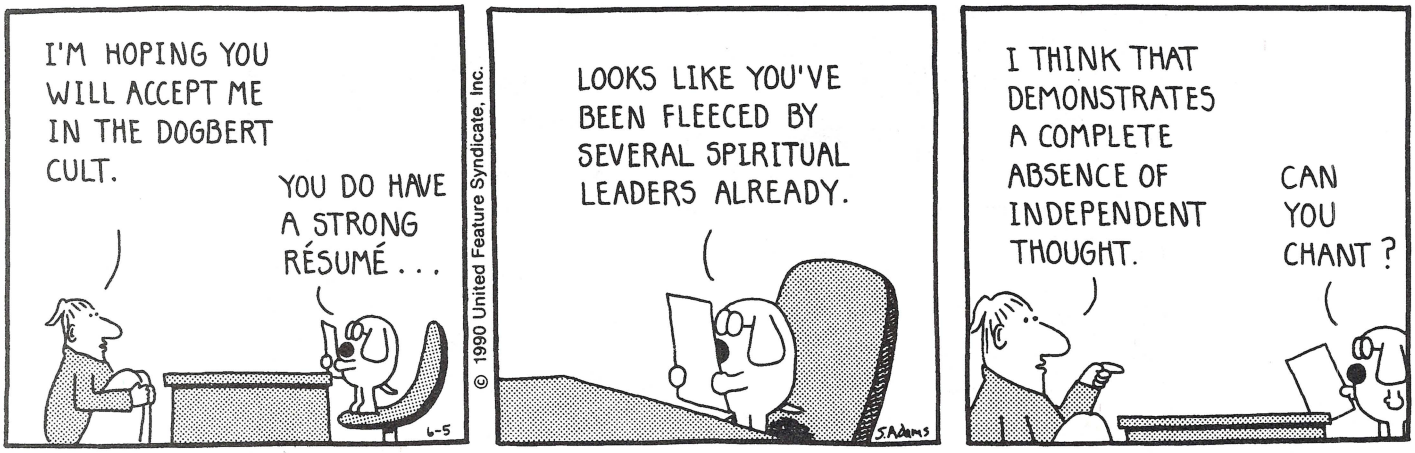
Gorby jokes don't age well.



Wouldn't it be great to own an elf?

This plan could actually work.

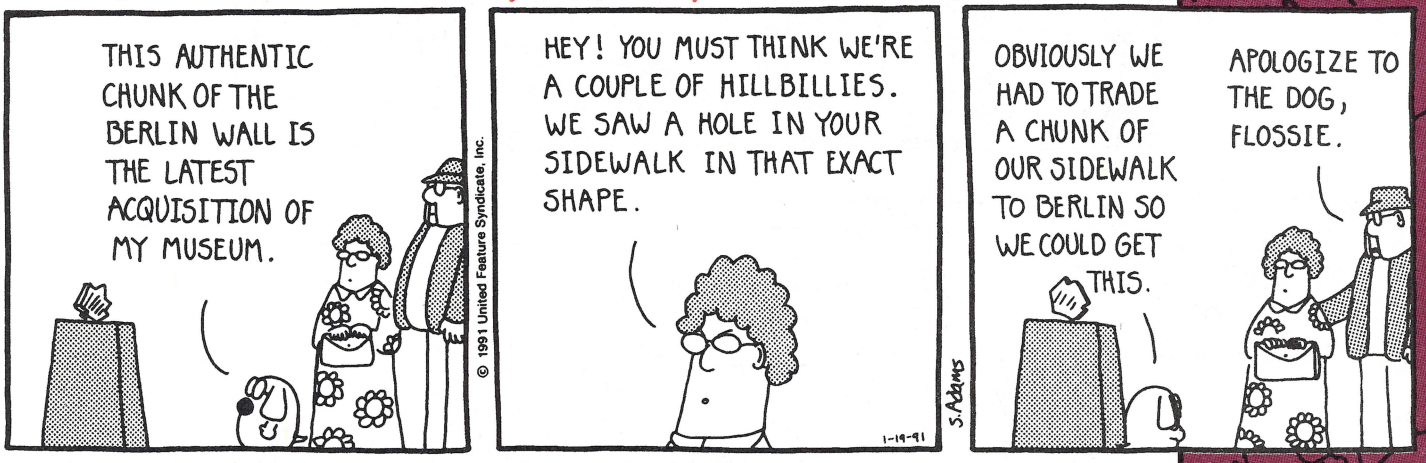
Do supermodels ever join cults? I don't think so.



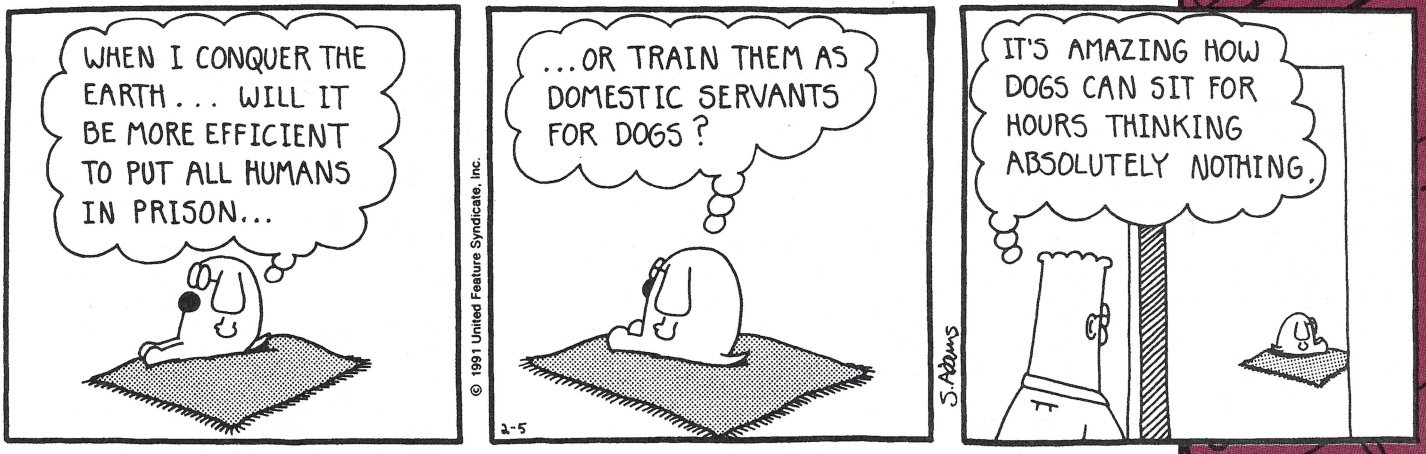
I don't usually laugh at my own jokes, but the phrase, "Can you chant?" kills me every time I reread it.

This is why "Geraldo" is taped.

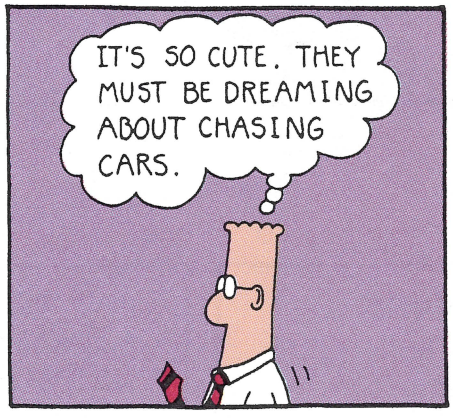
What happens when small weapons get more powerful? I hope I'm the first to get one on my block, while it's there.

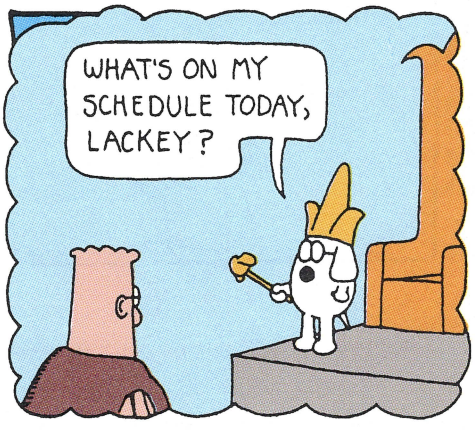


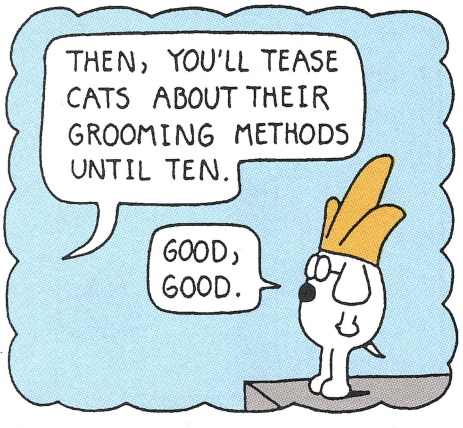
I have a chunk of the Berlin wall. I mean, I think I have one.

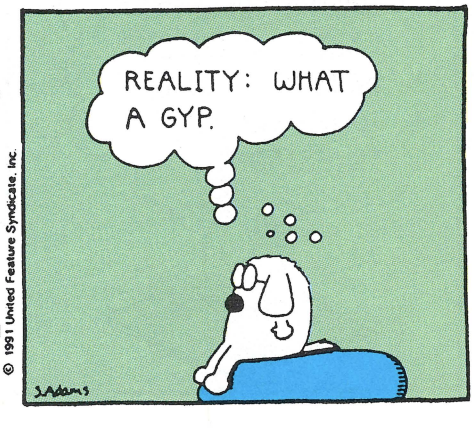


What do you think they're thinking about?

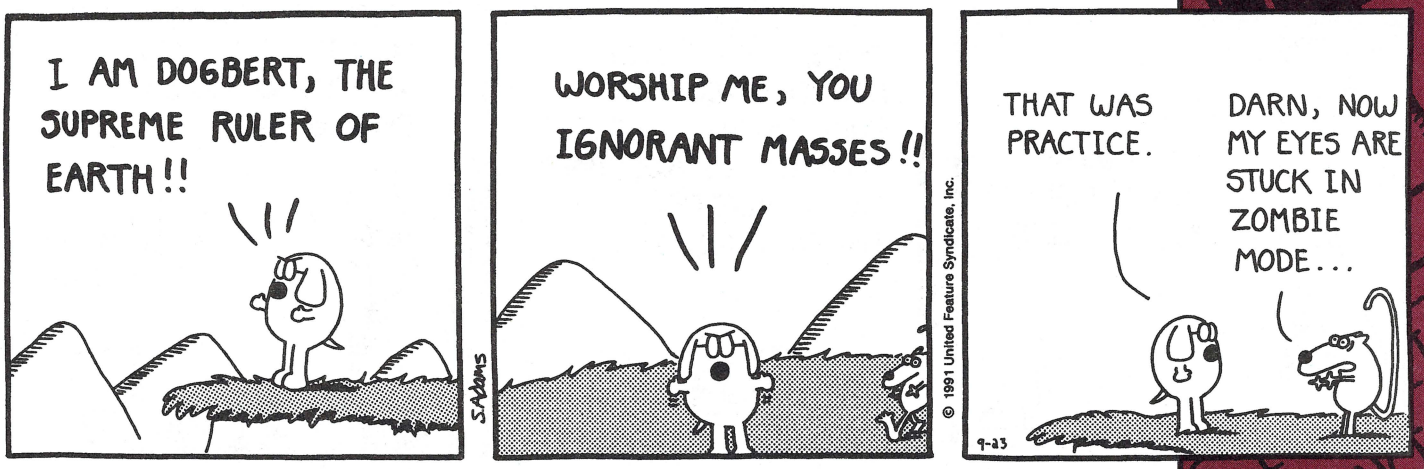




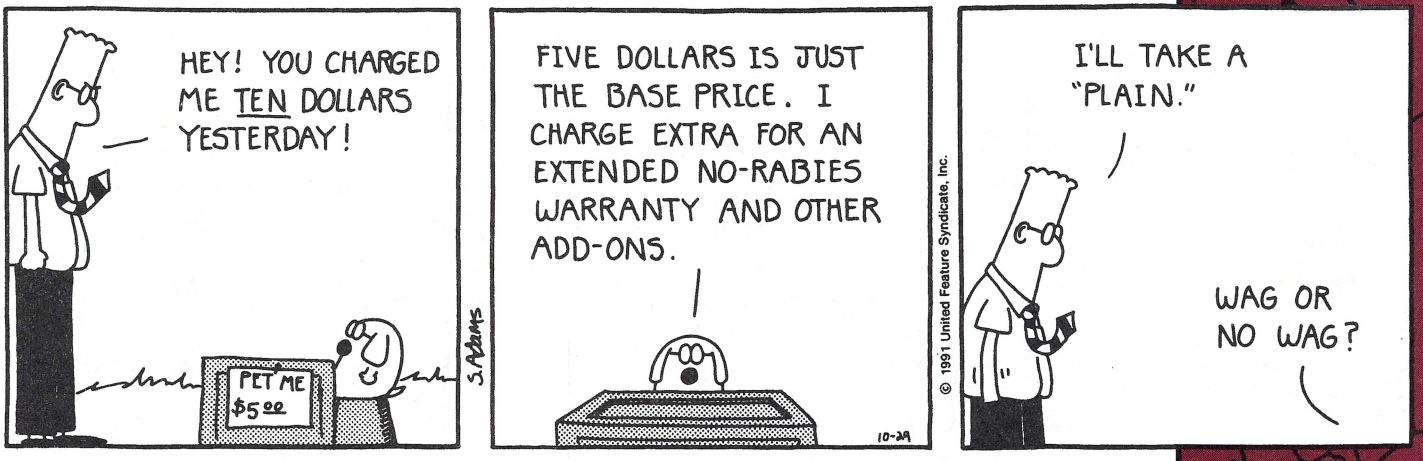




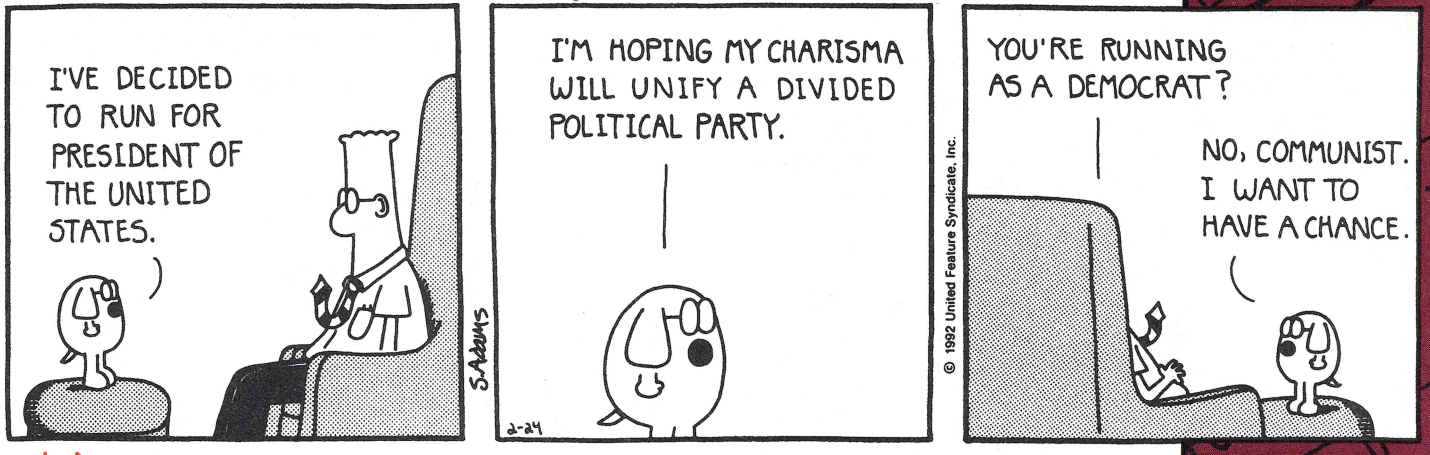
This is what I dream about too.



I'll bet some readers went into spontaneous zombie mode when they read this.



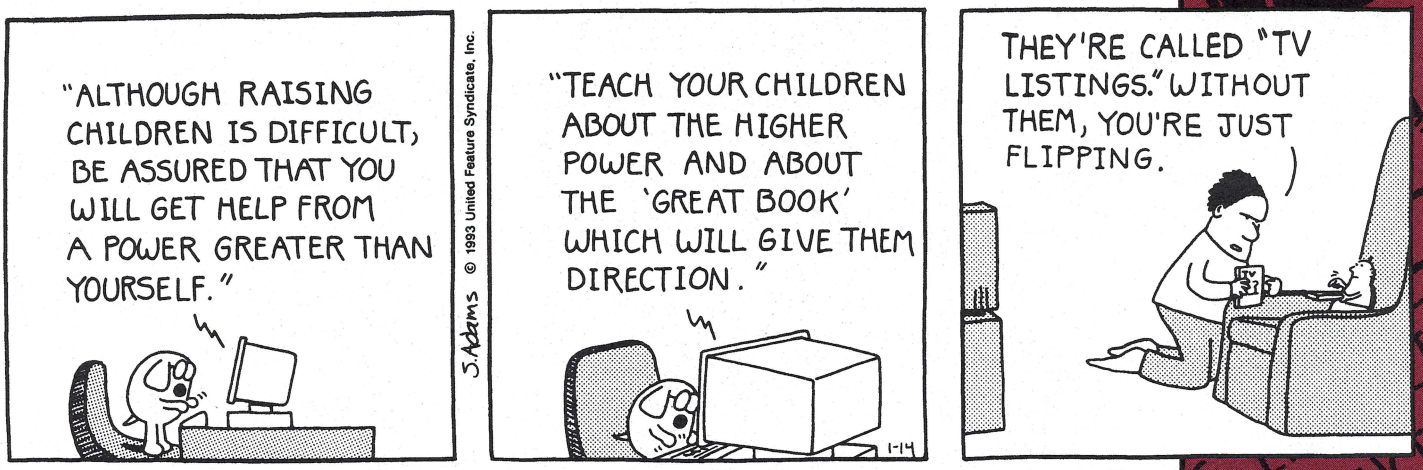
Who makes the rules about who can touch other creatures and how? It all seems kinda arbitrary to me.



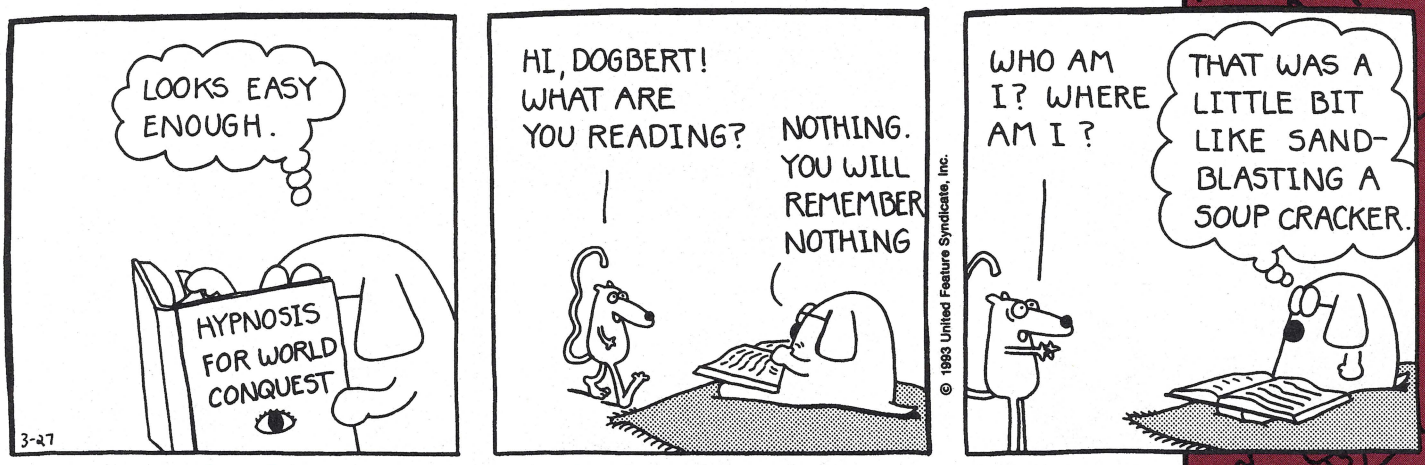
This joke made sense in 1992. Trust me.

Shouldn't there be a newsletter for the clueless?

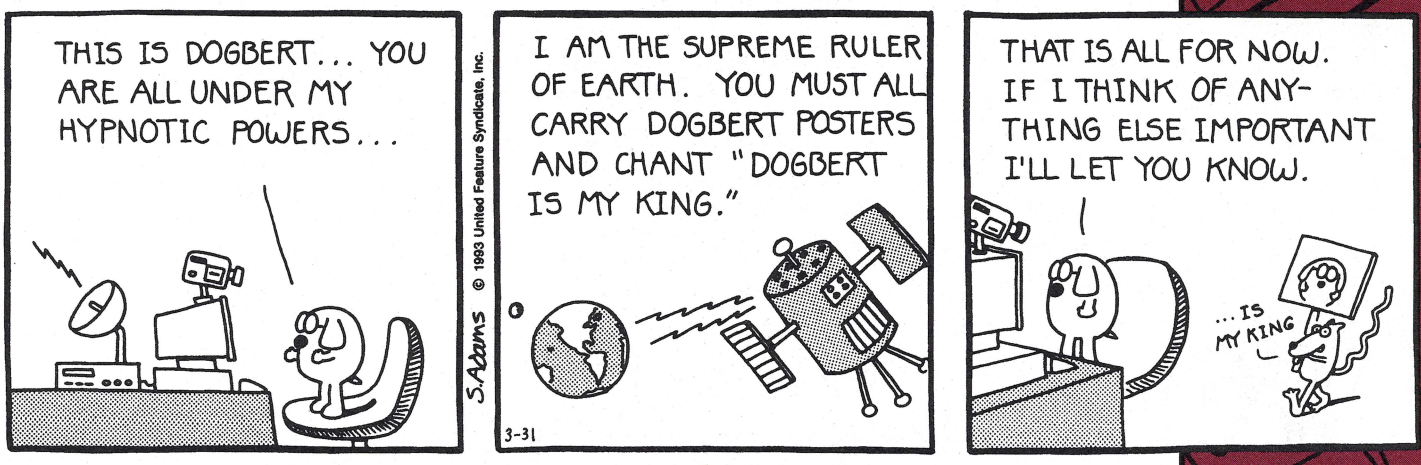
If there's a Hell, I'm going there for sure.

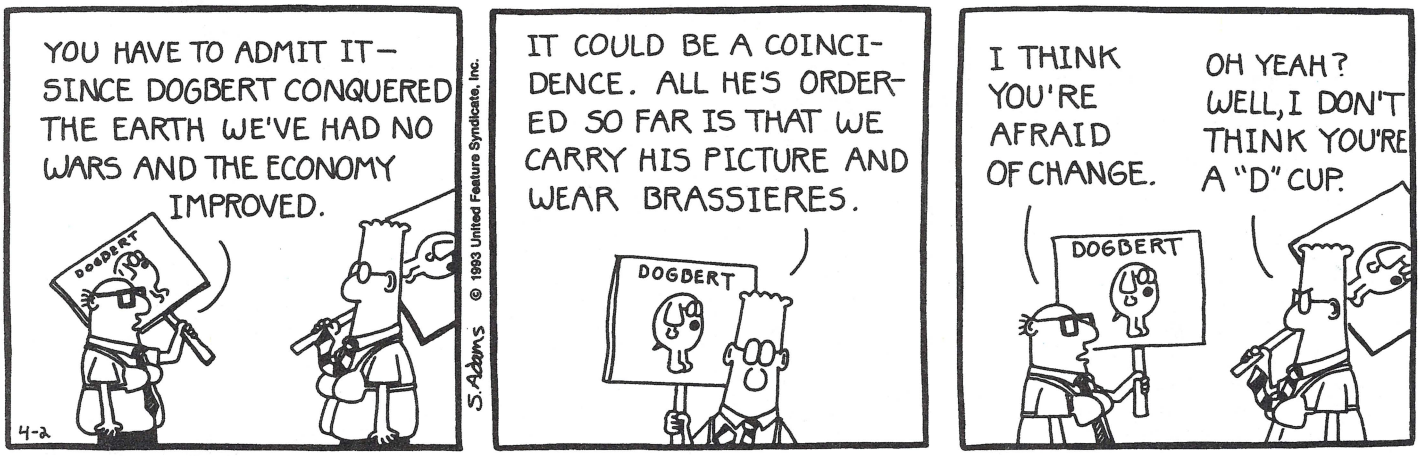


Is that the ugliest baby you ever saw?

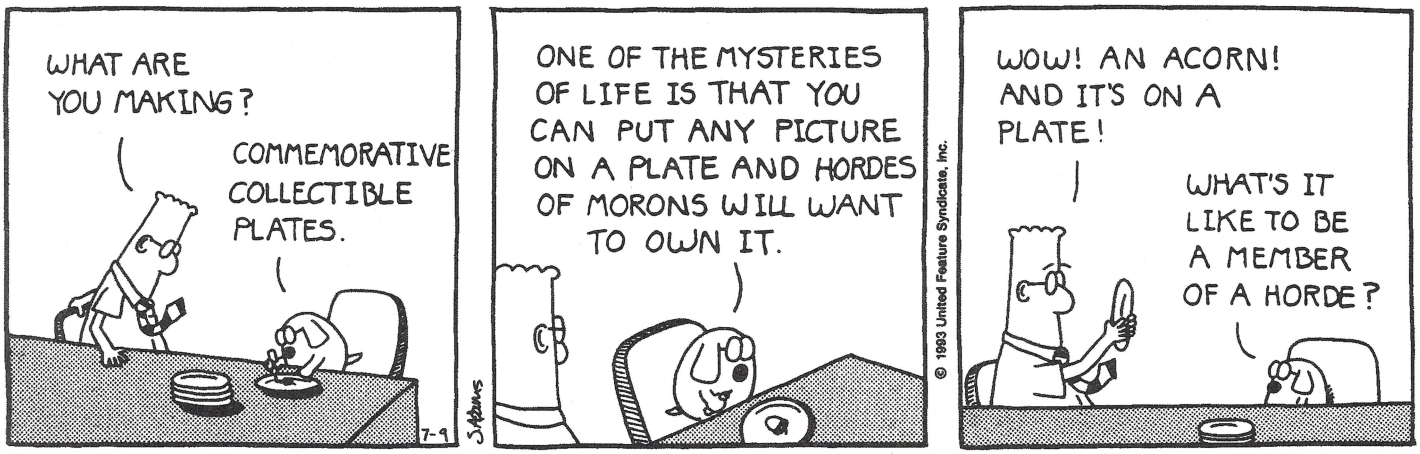


If hypnosis worked, wouldn't all the leaders be hypnotists? What if they are?

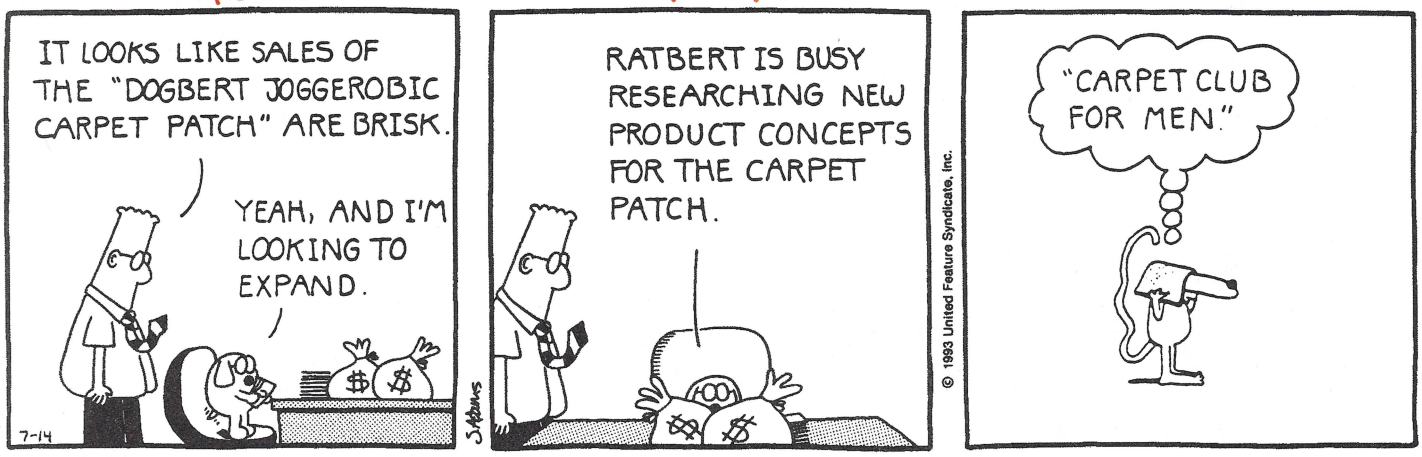




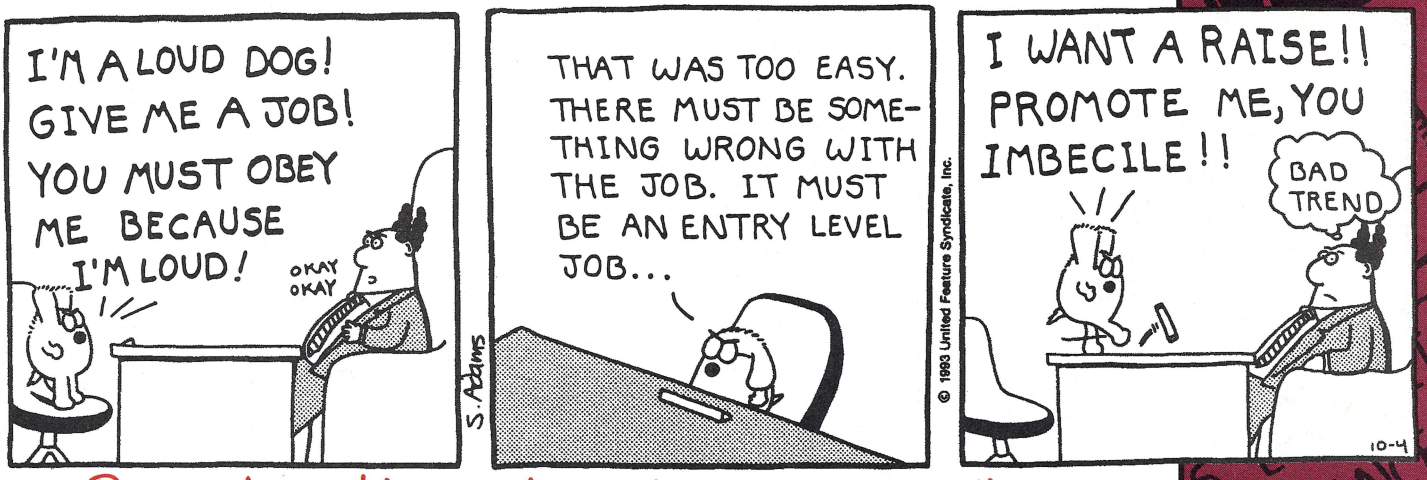
I favor the "Playful Despot" form of government.



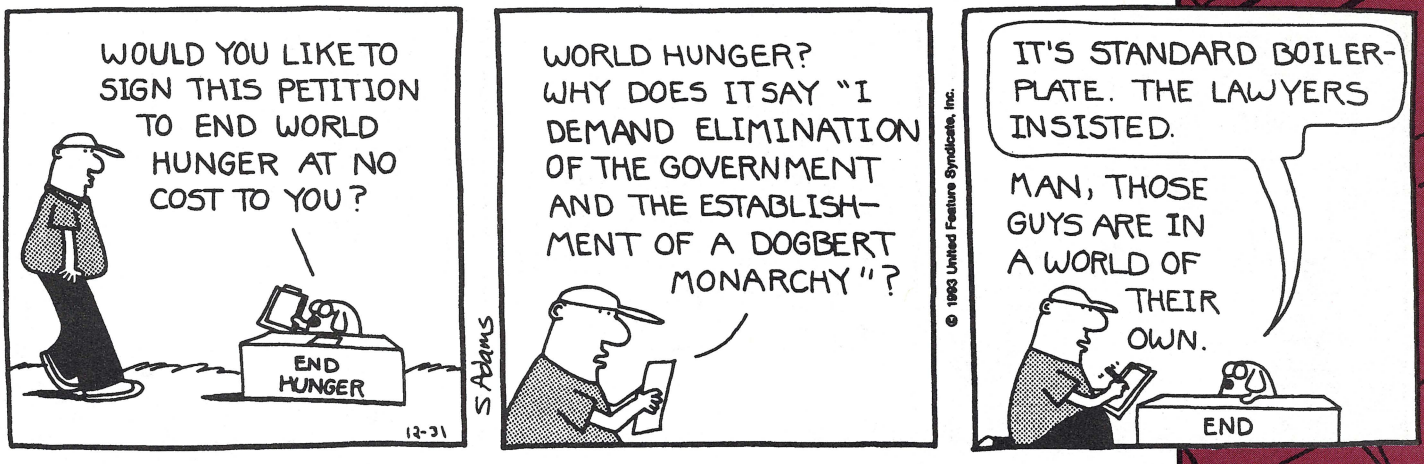
If I ever understand why people collect plates, I will know everything there is to know about people.



I'd buy it.



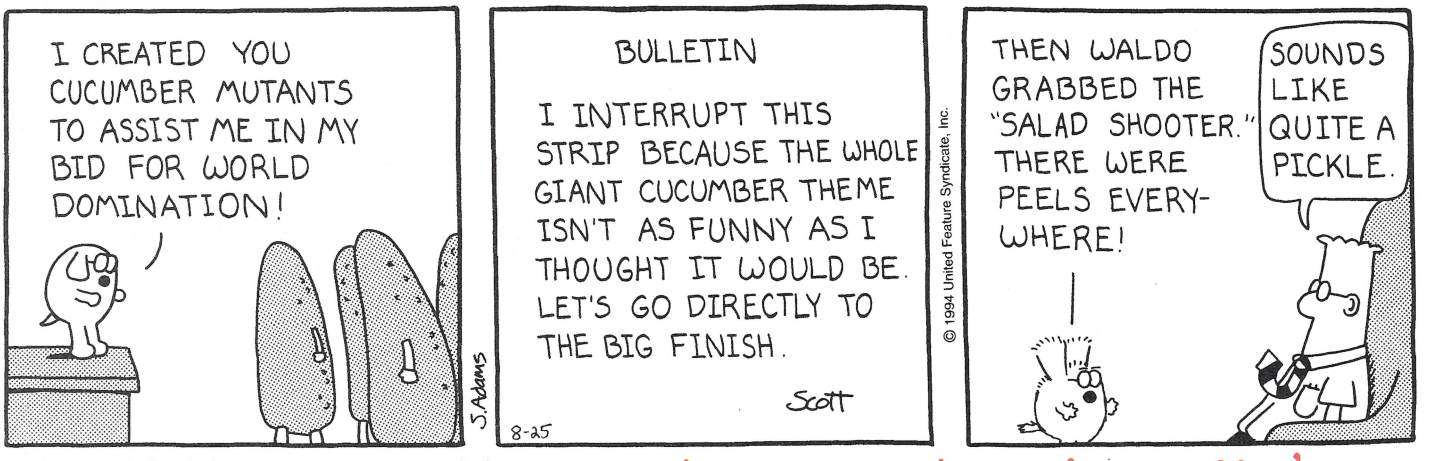
Dogbert continues to get aggressive. Here he's channeling the personality of a loud co-worker from my cubicle days.



Have you ever insisted on carefully reading a petition before signing? It makes the gatherers nervous.

This concept is based on an ex-co-worker's philosophy. It worked quite well.

Here's a story line that wasn't as fun on paper as it was in my head...



...But I was working my day job and couldn't afford to throw the cartoon out and do another. So I confessed.

. . . Saving Dilbert

I try to make the criminals non-stereotypical and caucasian so I don't get beat up.

Dogbert only seems non-dangerous.

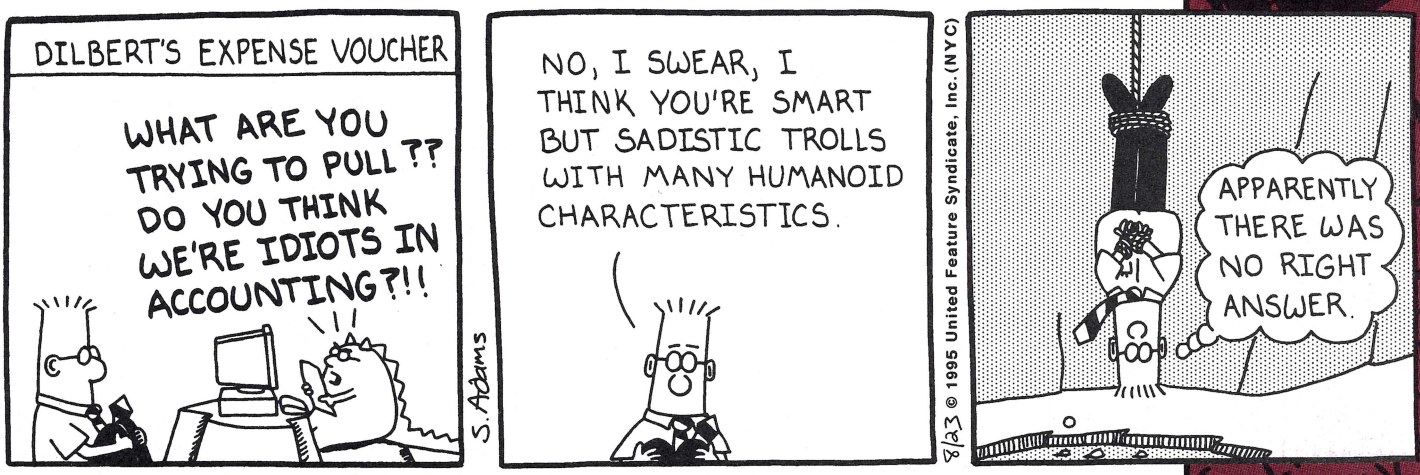
A reader told me that Vidal Sassoon was actually a tough character in his

wilder youth. I don't know if it's true.

This was my version of a touching "Lassie" plot.

Ultimately, Dogbert will always rescue Dilbert.

Remember, stalagmites might hang from the ceiling, but they don't.



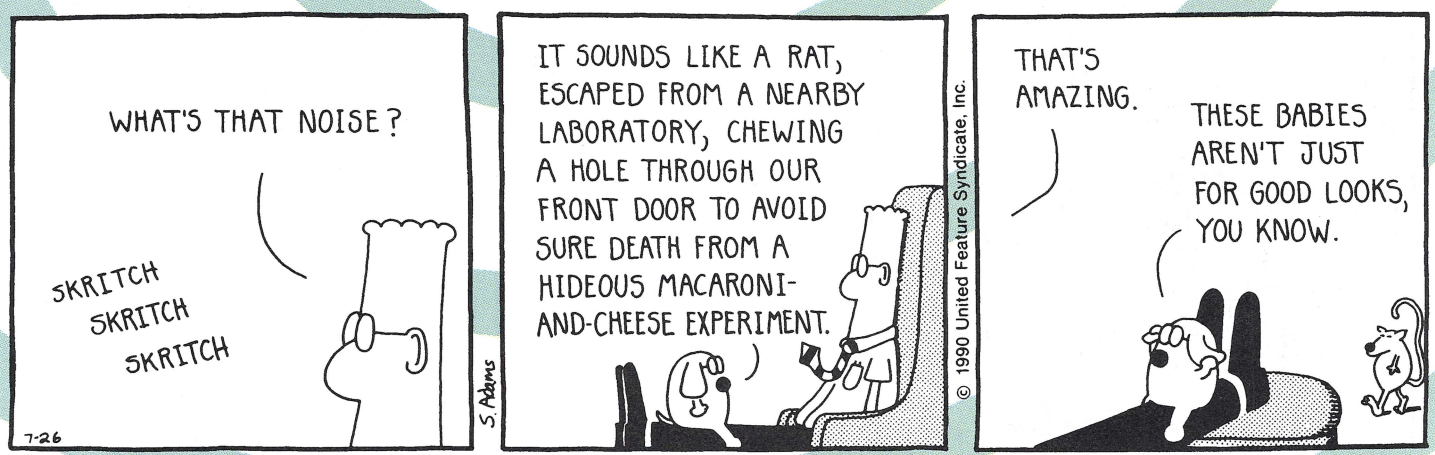
I have to turn the paper upside down to draw Dilbert upside down.

I love to write dialogue for two characters who are equally defective but in different ways.

I got lots of mail about this one. Many people didn't understand it. Others loved it.

This is the very first Ratbert appearance. I wasn't planning to make him a regular.

This is based loosely on the old "frogs with no legs are deaf" joke.

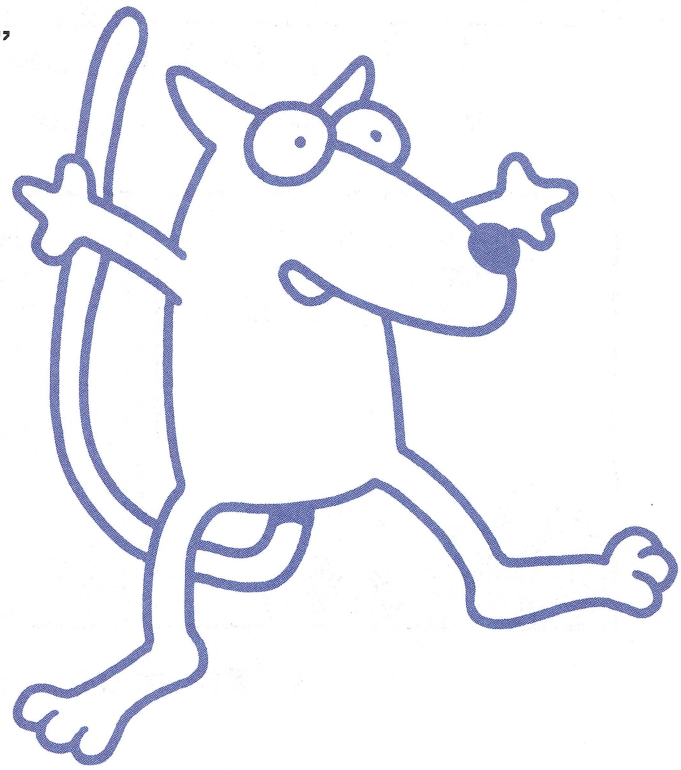


Sometimes it's hard to review the plot so you can get to the next joke.

RATBERT

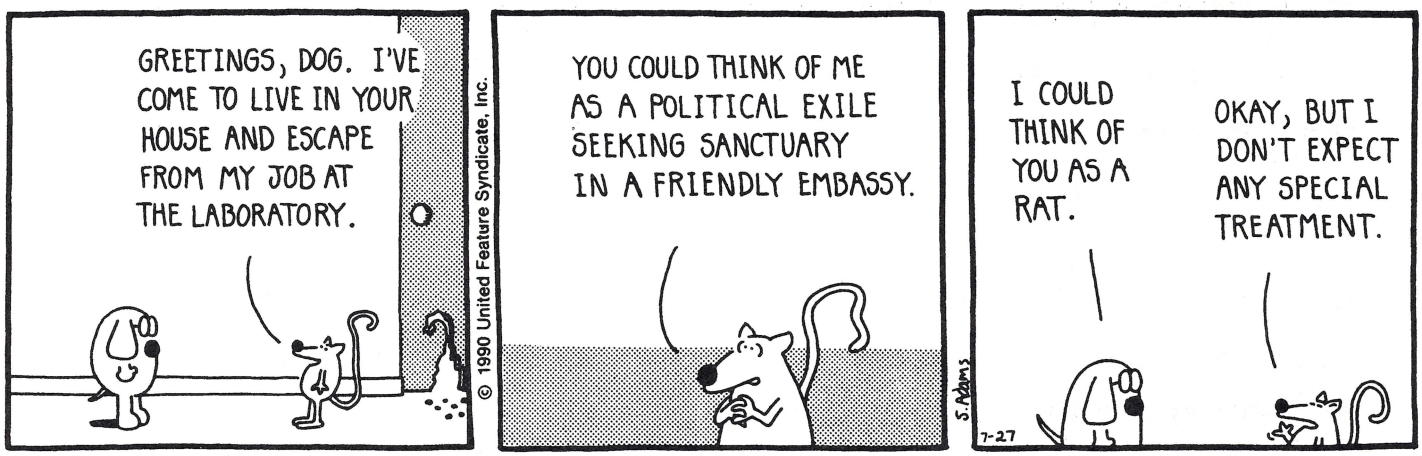
Ratbert was an unplanned addition to the **Dilbert** cast. It all started with one series of jokes about a gullible lab rat who thought he was being fed massive amounts of food simply because the scientist was a polite host.

Ratbert's scientist could only afford one rat because of budget cutbacks. That meant that he had to keep Ratbert alive from one experiment to the next. (It also meant I didn't have to draw a lot of rat "extras" standing around in the scene.)



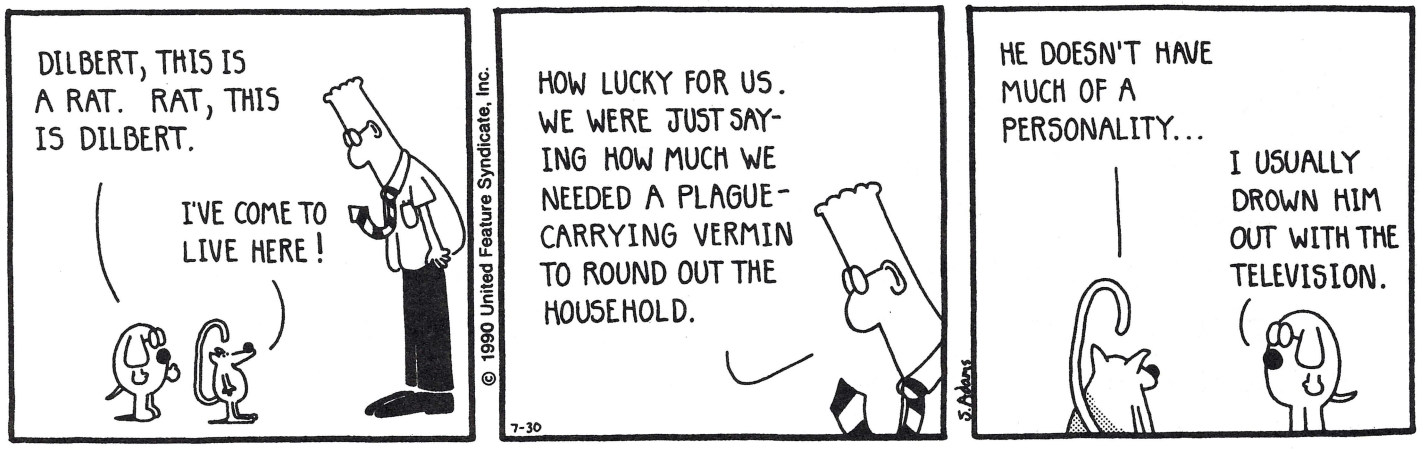
I like to keep my characters on the edge of awareness about their situation. In this case Ratbert was starting to get suspicious about the motives of the scientist. His innocence and exuberance were personally amusing to me and easy to write. The challenge was integrating him with Dilbert's household.

So I had Ratbert escape and seek asylum in Dilbert's house. Ratbert's goal was to be welcomed by Dilbert and Dogbert as part of the family. Sadly, Dilbert was biased against rats so it was tough rowing at first. Many readers seemed to relate to Ratbert's pathetic outsider status and his desire to be accepted. I ended up liking the little guy too. So I kept him. Eventually Dilbert and Dogbert kept him too.

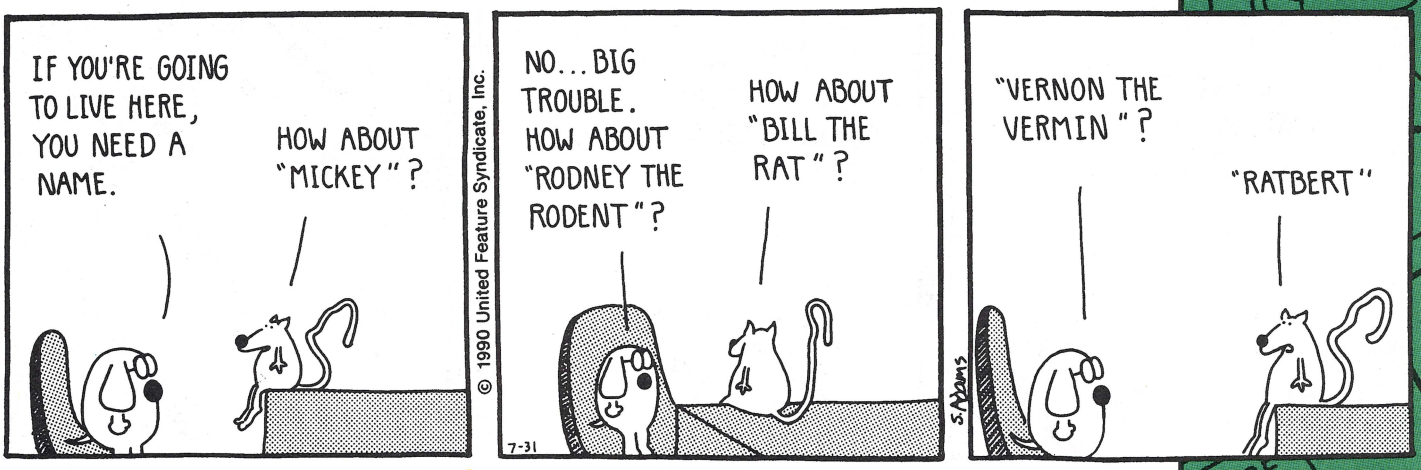


At first, Ratbert can't imagine why anyone would be prejudiced against rats.

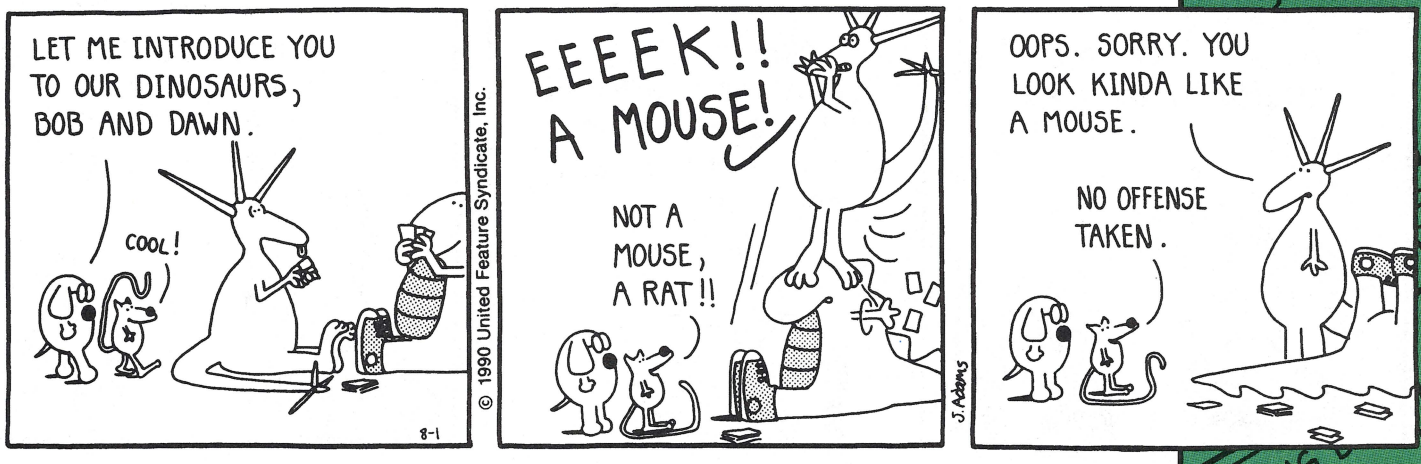
I often felt like Ratbert in my cubicle maze.



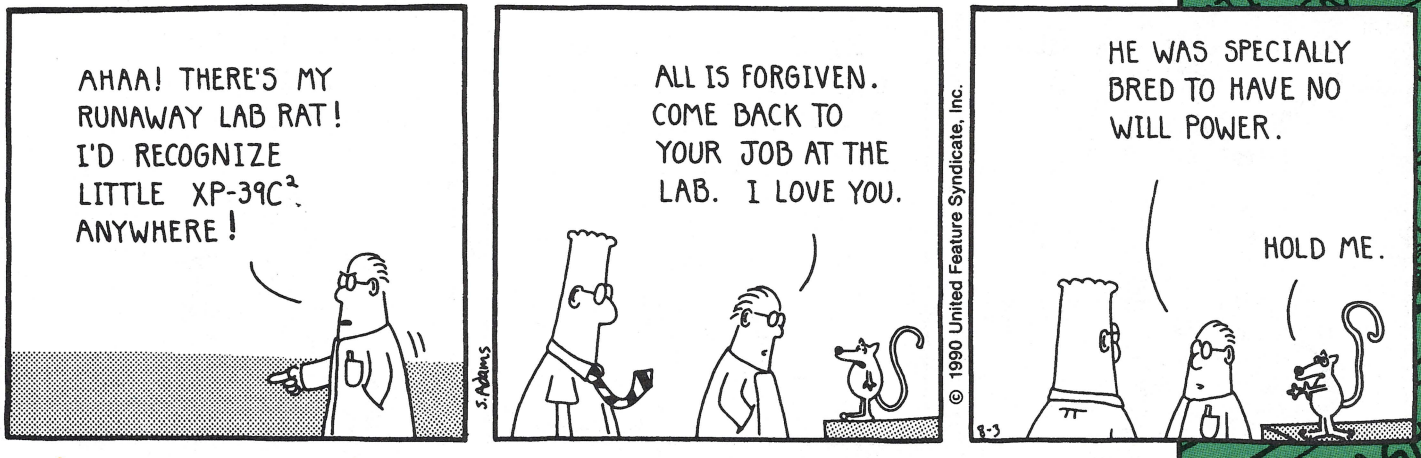
Dilbert is particularly closed-minded about rats.



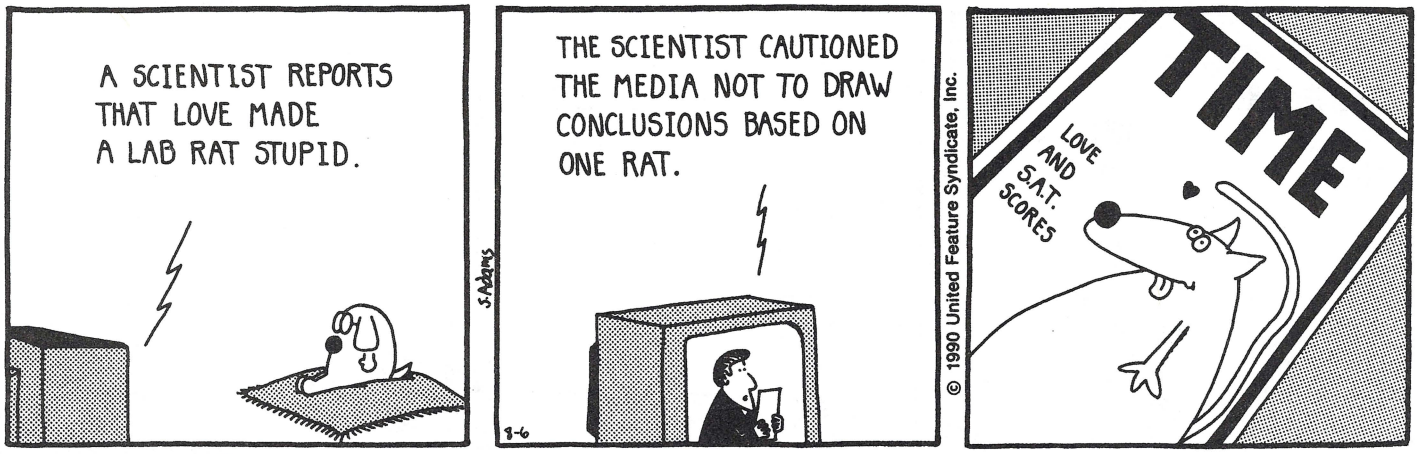
Ratbert was the first "bert" after Dogbert, thus establishing a pattern.



Ratbert is prejudiced against mice.

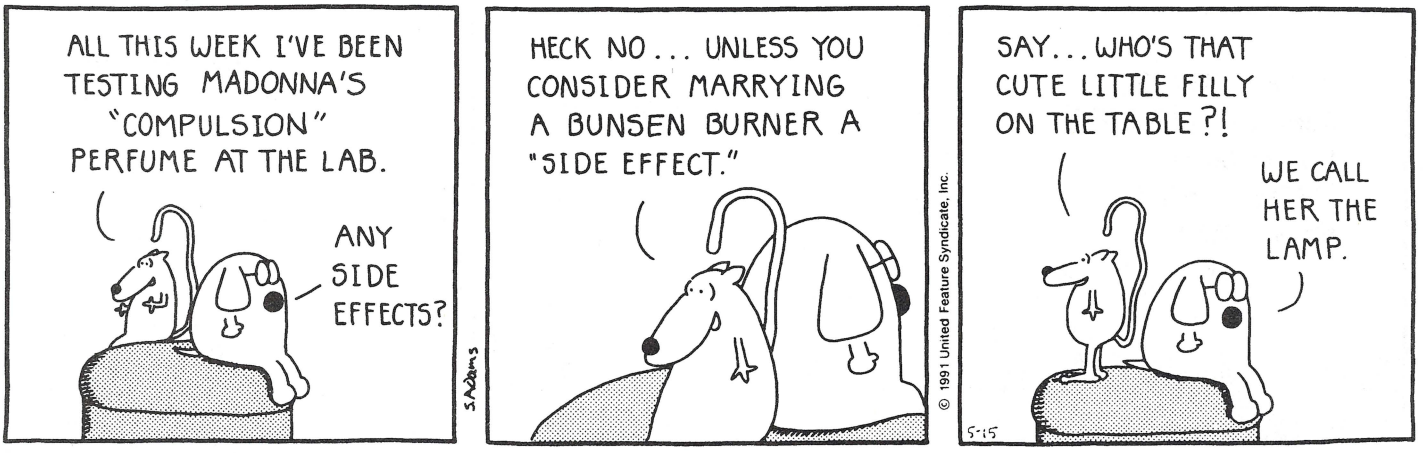


Here's a good trivia question: what was Ratbert's original name?

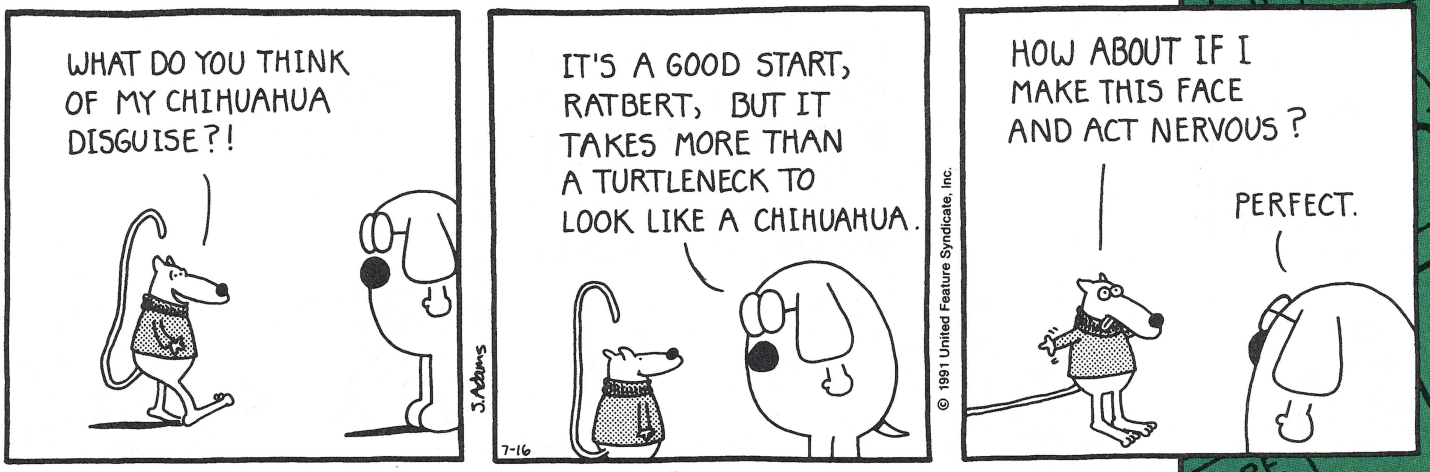


If it weren't for lack of context, there would be no news.

Don't you love the phrase "Tiny Kangaroos"?

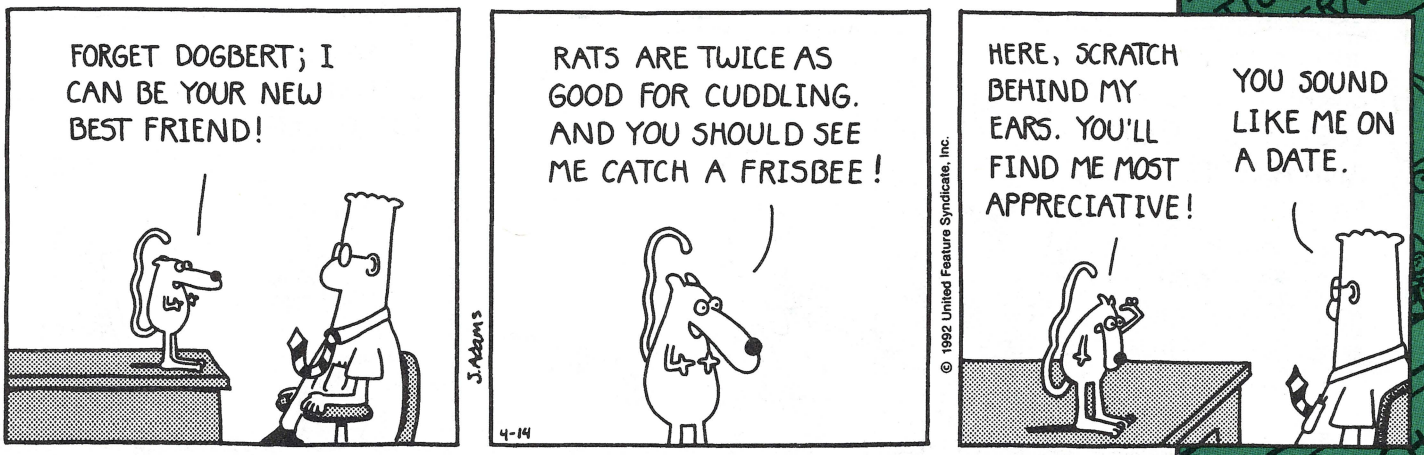


What if perfume actually did what it promised?



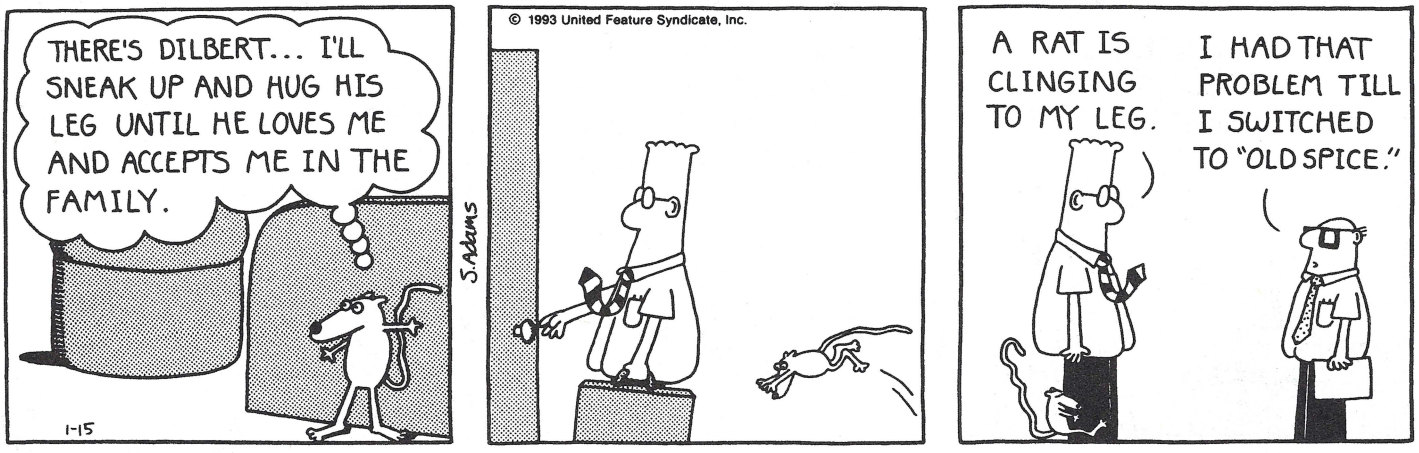
↑ words to live by.

Ratbert begins the full-court press for family acceptance.



I'm surprised I got away with this one.

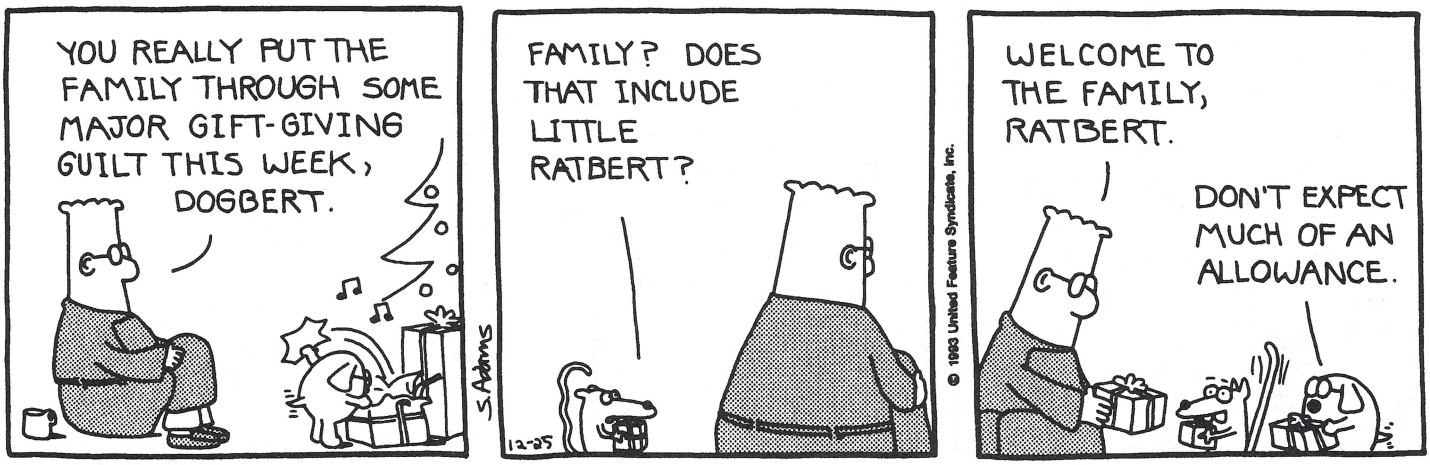
Ratbert got bigger because it was easier to draw him that way around the other characters.



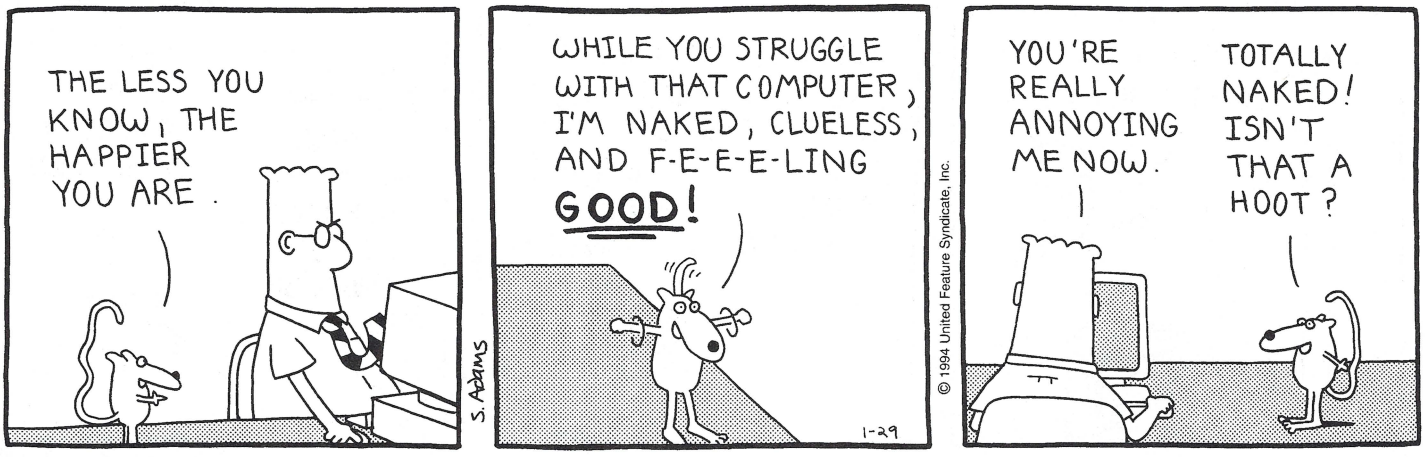
Ratbert is easy to write for because he's so cute. Anything he says sounds funnier because of that.

Paired with Bob the Dinosaur, there's almost too much cuteness.

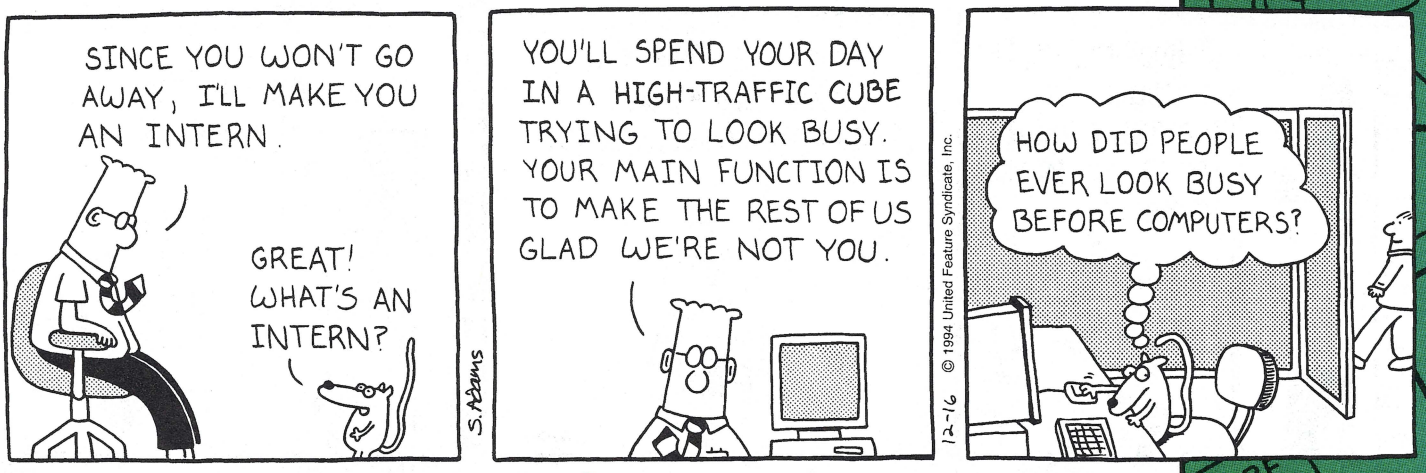
Things are looking bad for Ratbert...



Finally, Ratbert is accepted in the family.



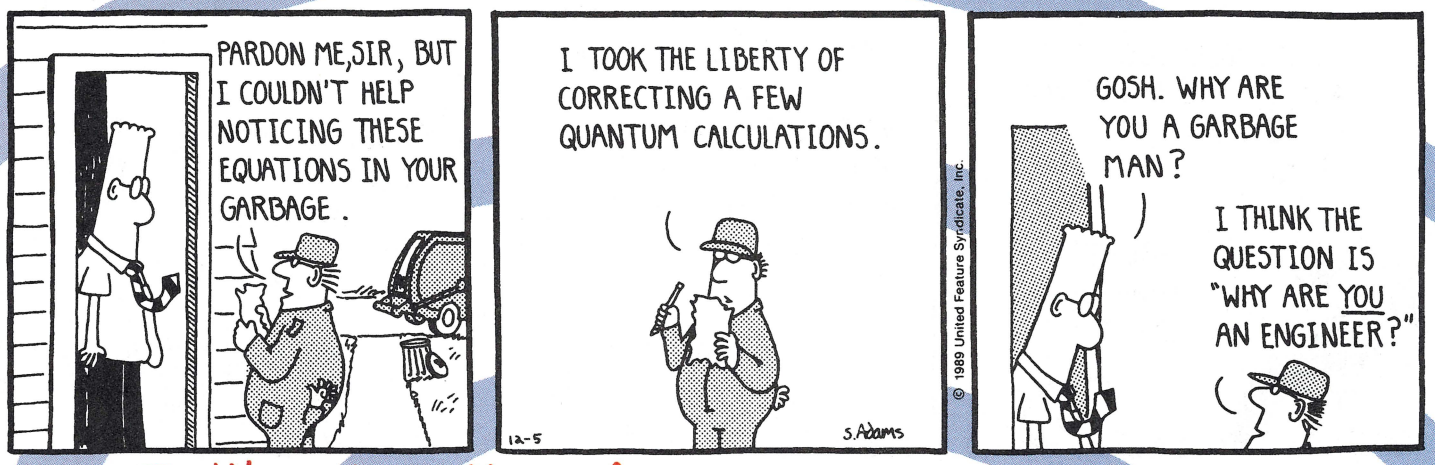
Like any family member, Ratbert is free to be annoying.



Ratbert is perfect for low-ego jobs.

Do you think successful people tell all of their secrets?

Has anyone ever been inspired by a poster?

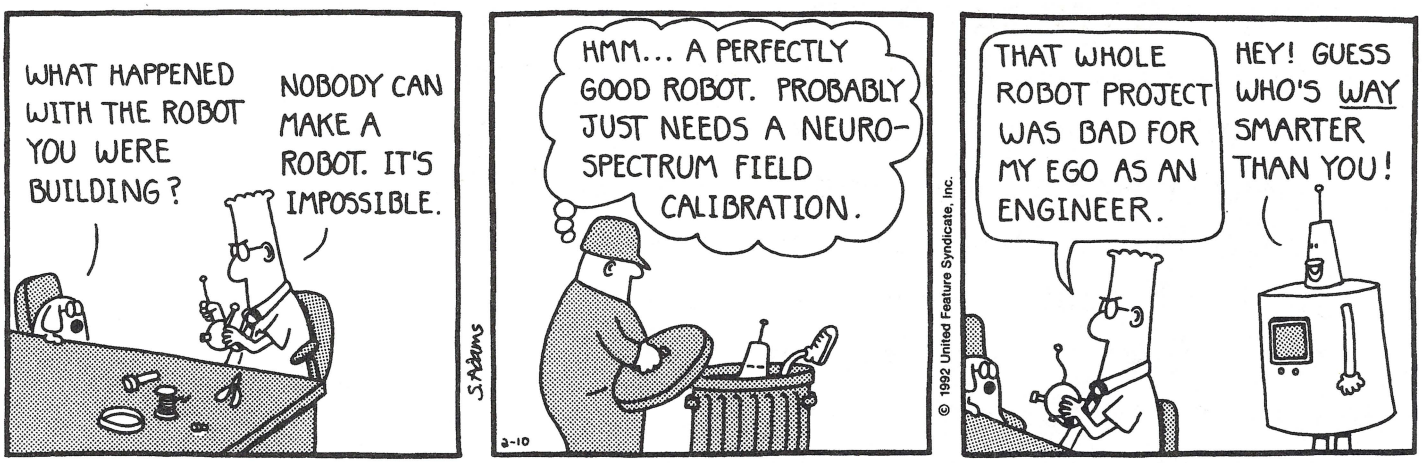


I like the idea of geniuses existing around us in unlikely professions.

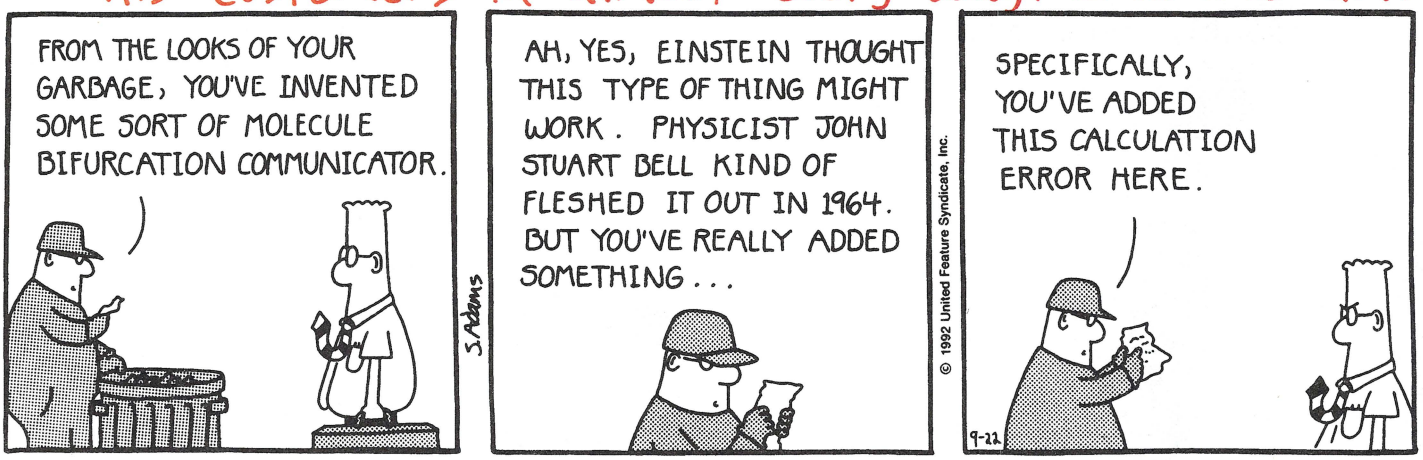
If a genius does something that doesn't make sense to me, why do I think he's wrong?

GARBAGEMAN

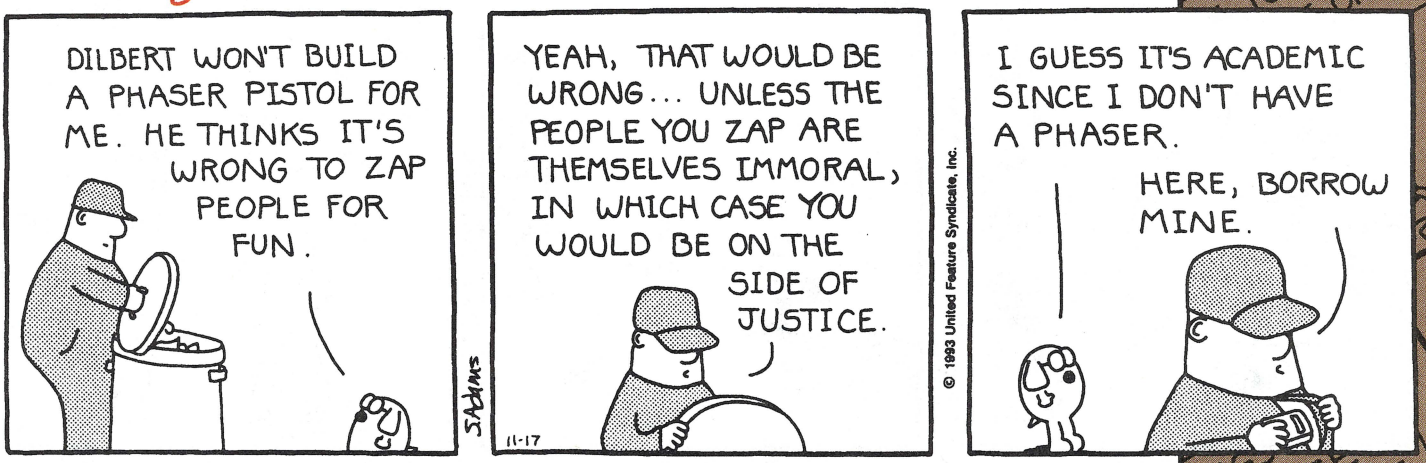
Dilbert's **Garbageman** is the world's smartest human. I like putting incongruous things together. The unanswered question about this character is why he would choose to be a garbageman if he was the smartest man in the world. But if you think about it, we wouldn't be in a position to judge anything done by the world's smartest person. Obviously his decisions would be different from our own—he's smarter! So if we don't understand why he does what he does, the problem is probably on our end.



I knew a garbage man who found great stuff in the trash and fixed it up. He was literally smarter than his customers in almost every way. I admired him.



I get many suggestions from non-cartoonists. The worst part is that many of them are good.



I wish I had a phaser.

I played in a co-ed soccer league. We lost every game. I kept watching my teammates instead of the ball.

I wanted Liz to look athletic, but she looks 12 years old.

Hey, It's hard to draw soccer balls! You try it.

LIZ

I created **Liz** so Dilbert could experience having a girlfriend. Liz is a materials engineer and a good soccer player. She likes brainy guys and she has very big hair. That's all we know about her.

Many readers asked me to allow Dilbert to lose his innocence with Liz, so to speak. But I didn't see any way I could do that in a comic strip and get it past the editors. So I developed a secret sign. I told the people who receive the **Dilbert** newsletter that if Dilbert ever got lucky with Liz, I would draw his normally upturned necktie flat one day. I expected a flood of e-mail from people encouraging me to do it.

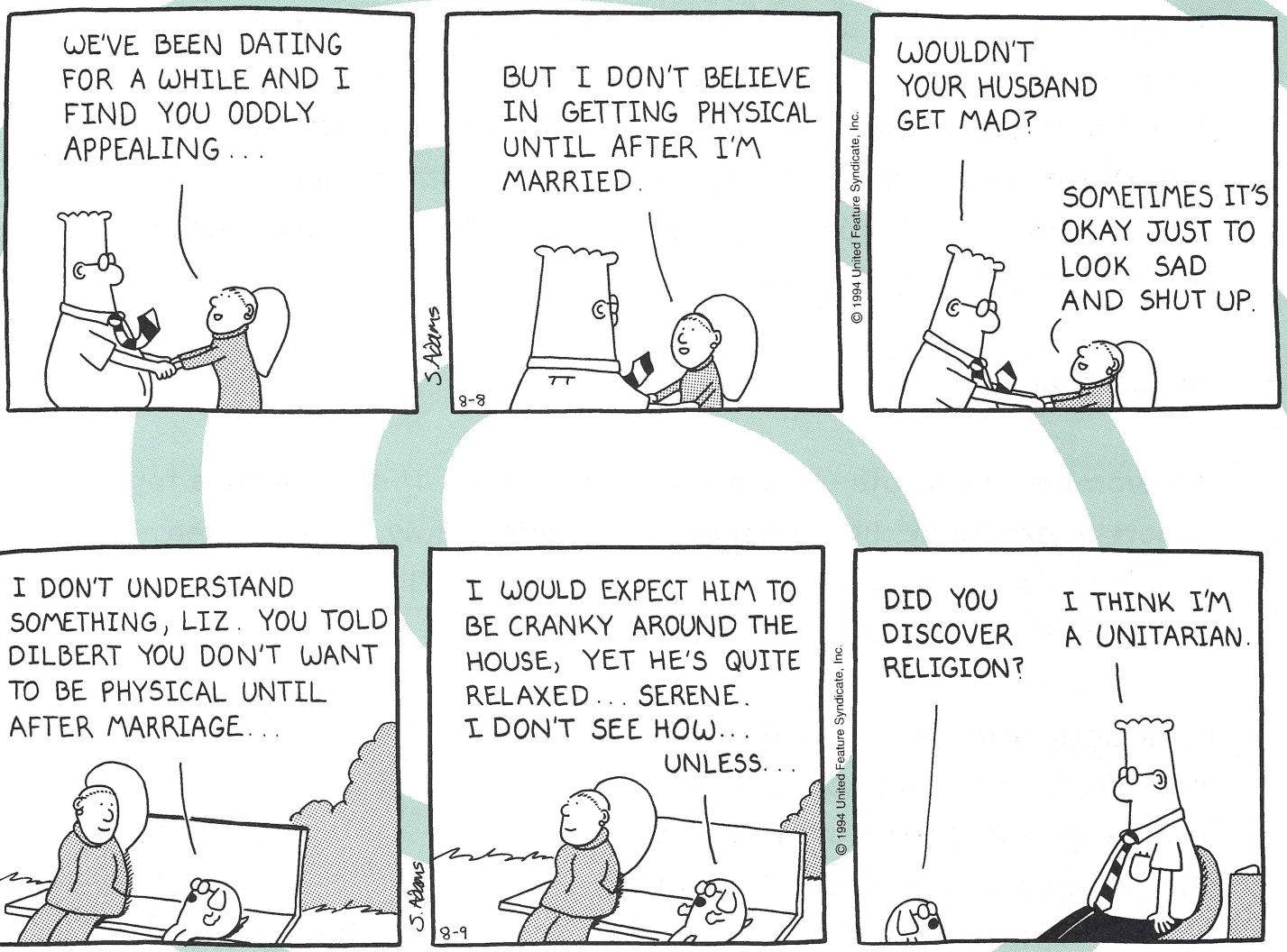
I was wrong.

The women who wrote were almost unanimous in their desire for Dilbert to get lucky. But the men were split evenly. Half wanted Dilbert to do the deed and half said, in effect, "I don't think Dilbert should get lucky until I do."

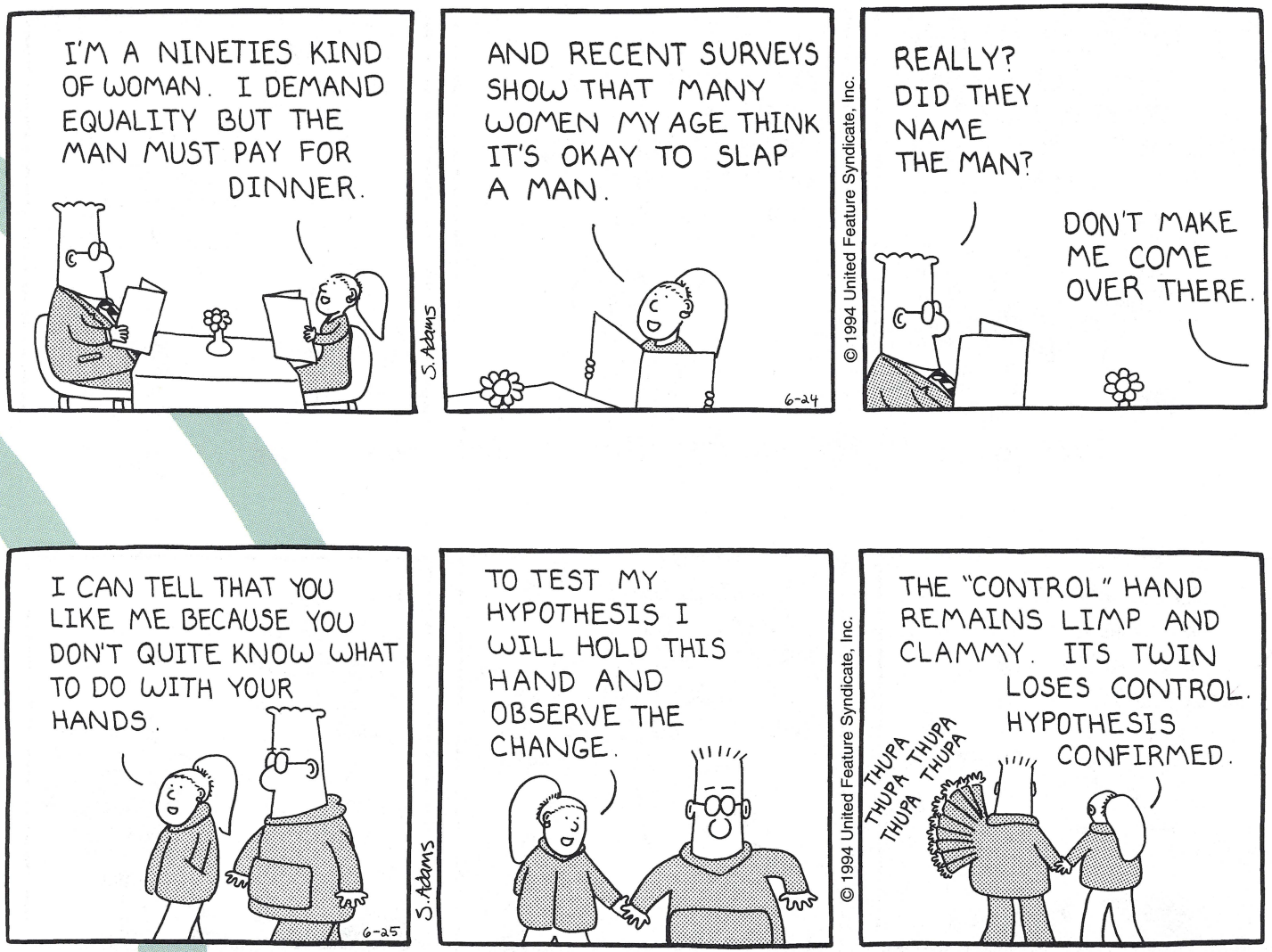
Apparently a large segment of the male population was using Dilbert as a yardstick of their own success with women and they didn't want to fall any further behind.

Now I had a problem.

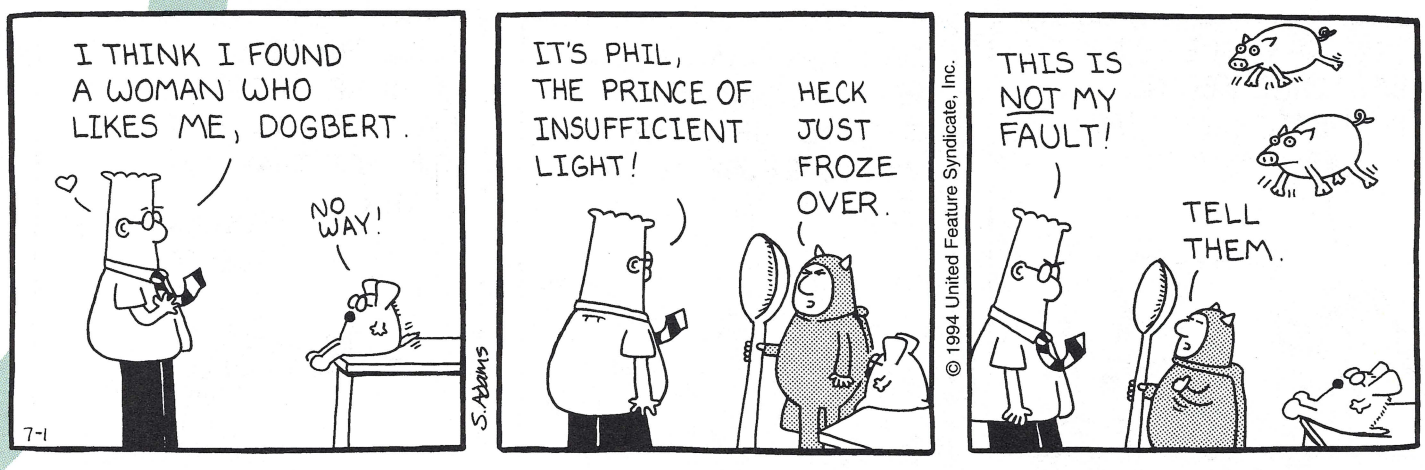
I ended up finessing the situation by writing a strip with an intentionally ambiguous ending. Everyone had the option of thinking his view prevailed. Here is the lead up to the flat tie strip.



My biggest problem with Liz is that I'm not very good at drawing attractive female characters. People told me she looked twelve years old. And she never really clicked with me or the readers, so I eventually gave up on her and had her break up with Dilbert. I don't know if she'll be back.



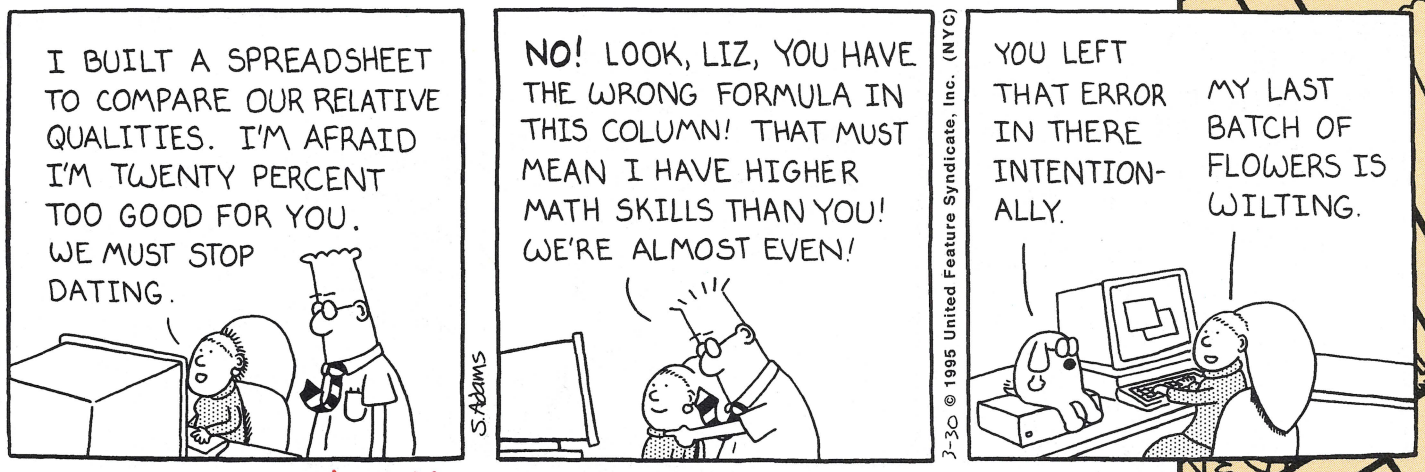
I liked the concept of Liz being a science wonk.



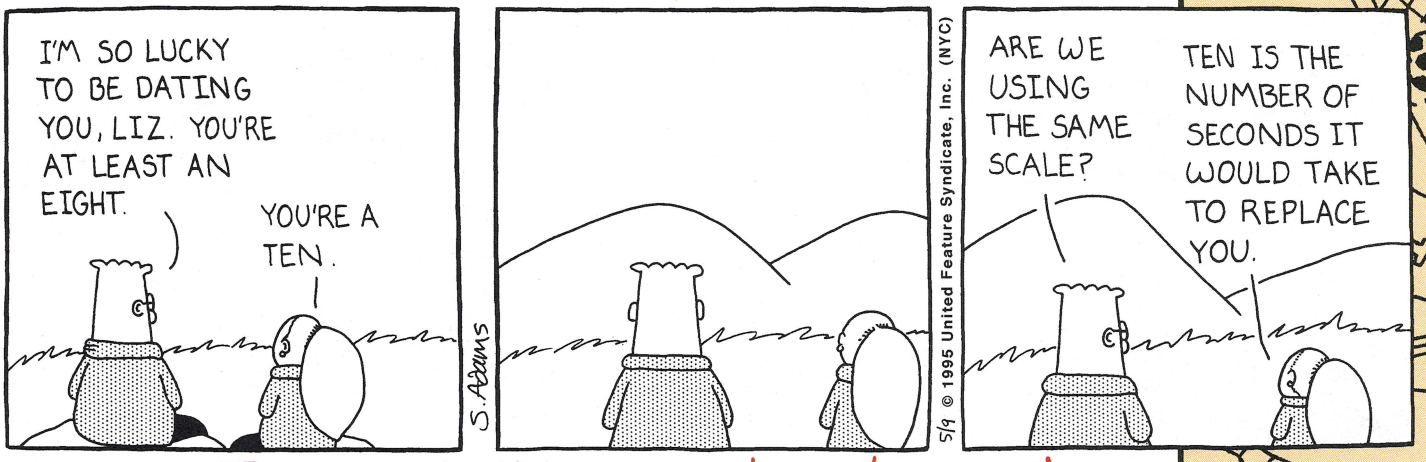
Everyone understands the third date rule, right?

I was toying with the idea of bumping Liz off, but this was as close as it got.

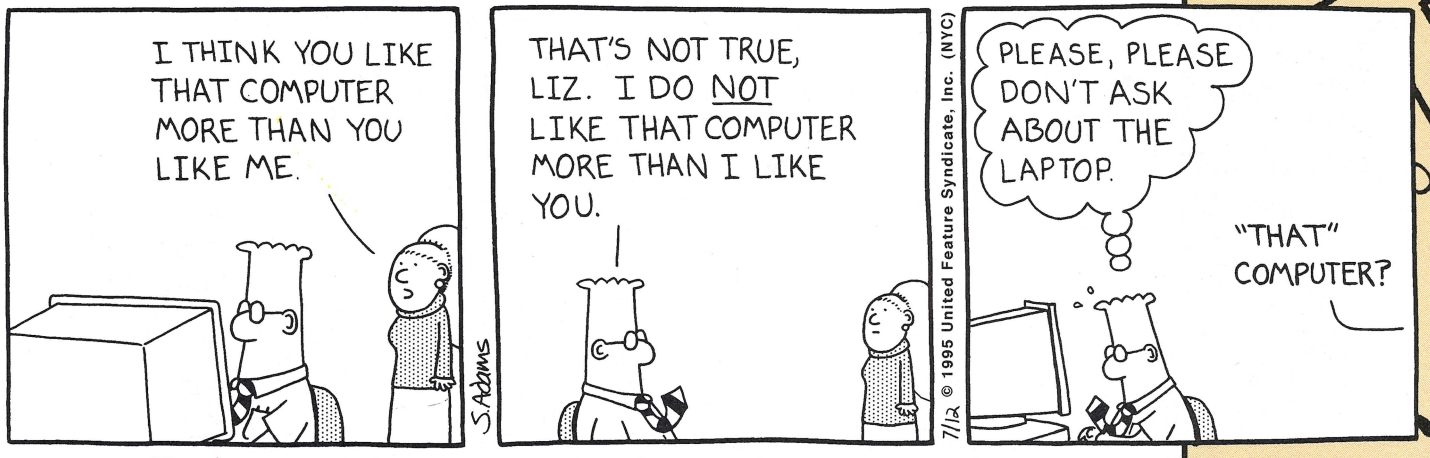
Liz would have to be acceptable to Dogbert.



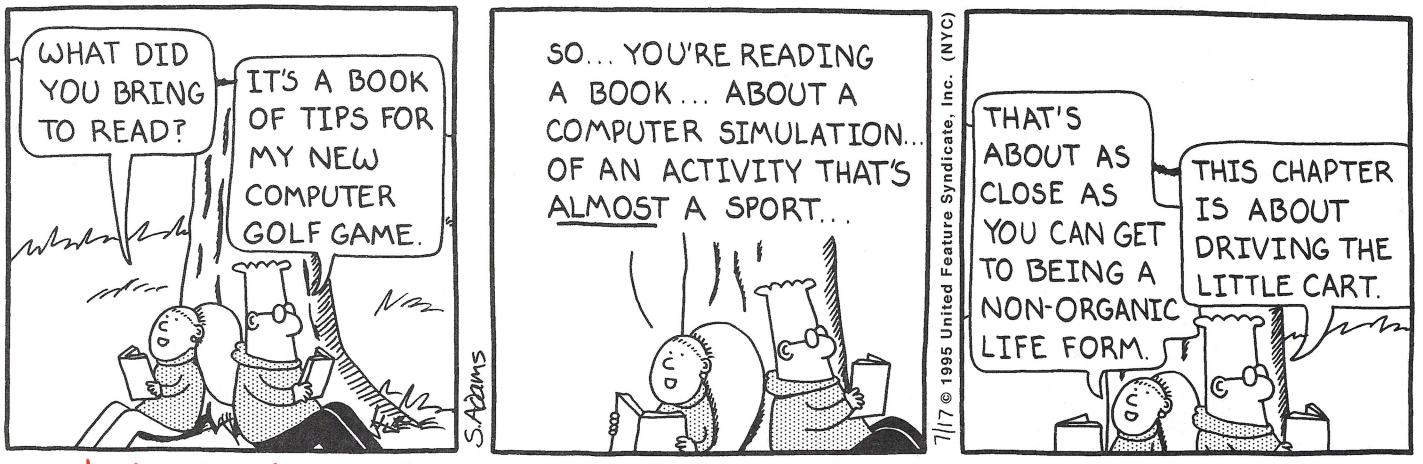
Liz had to like Dilbert's nerdiness or the relationship made no sense.



I suspect this scene has happened a million times in real life.

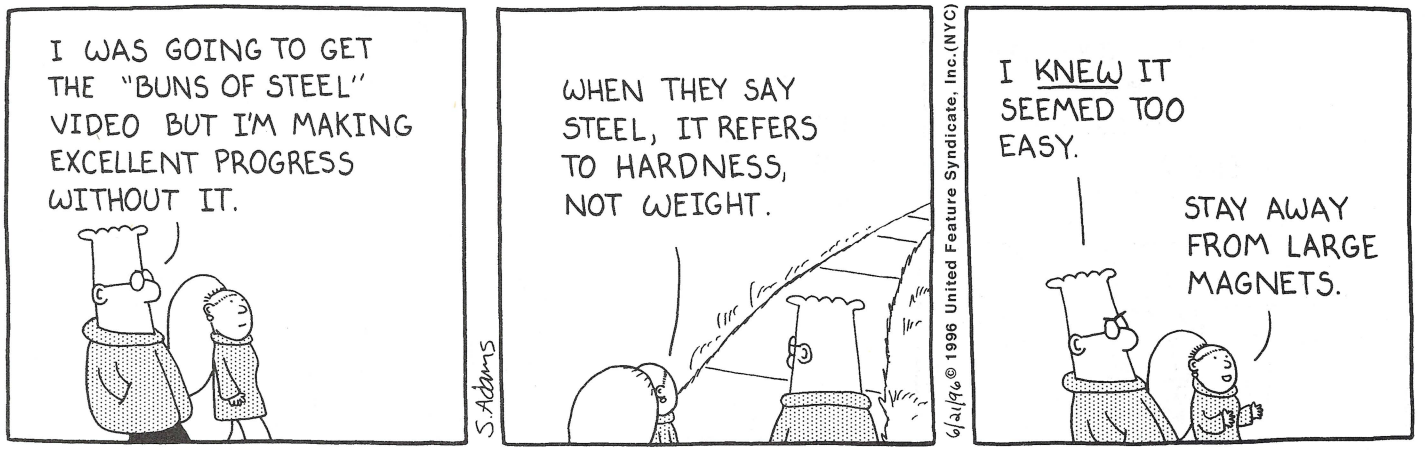


I have the cutest little laptop. I love that thing.

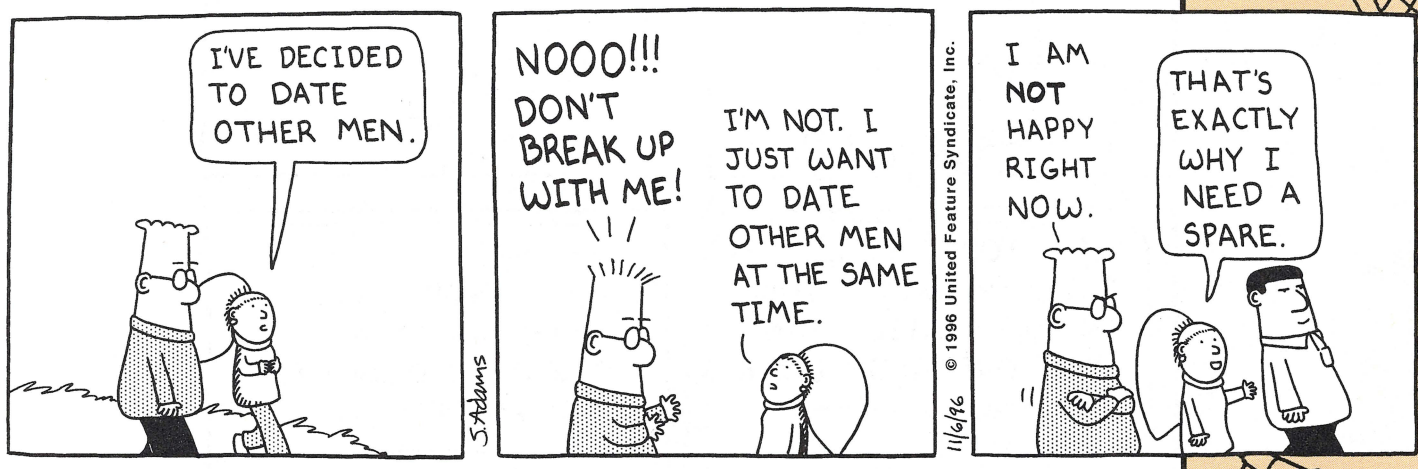


what about me? I drew a cartoon about reading a book about a simulation...

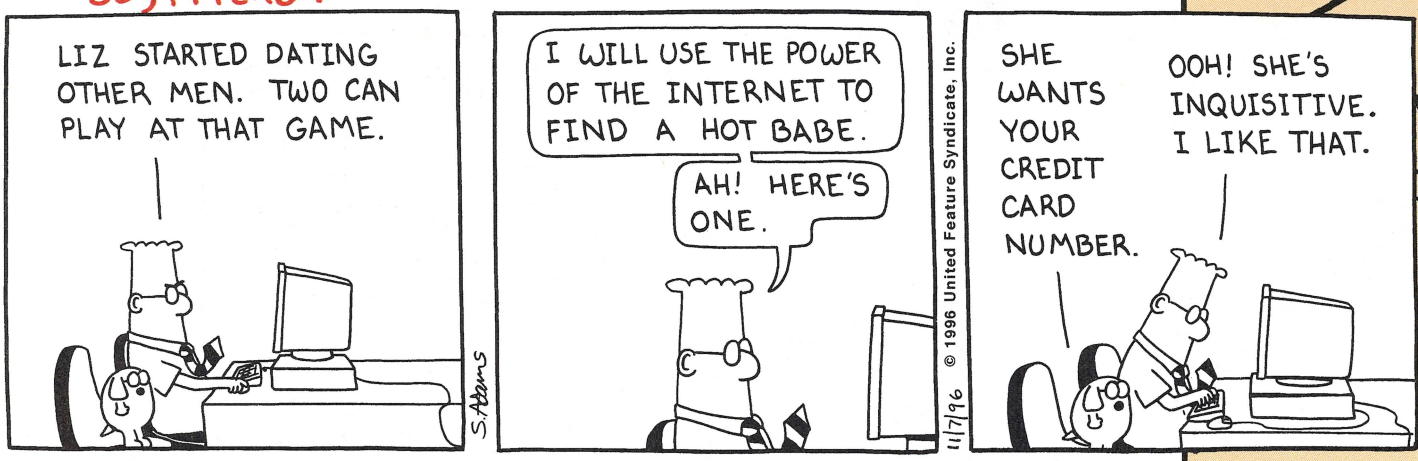
Why is the floor more comfortable than the couch?

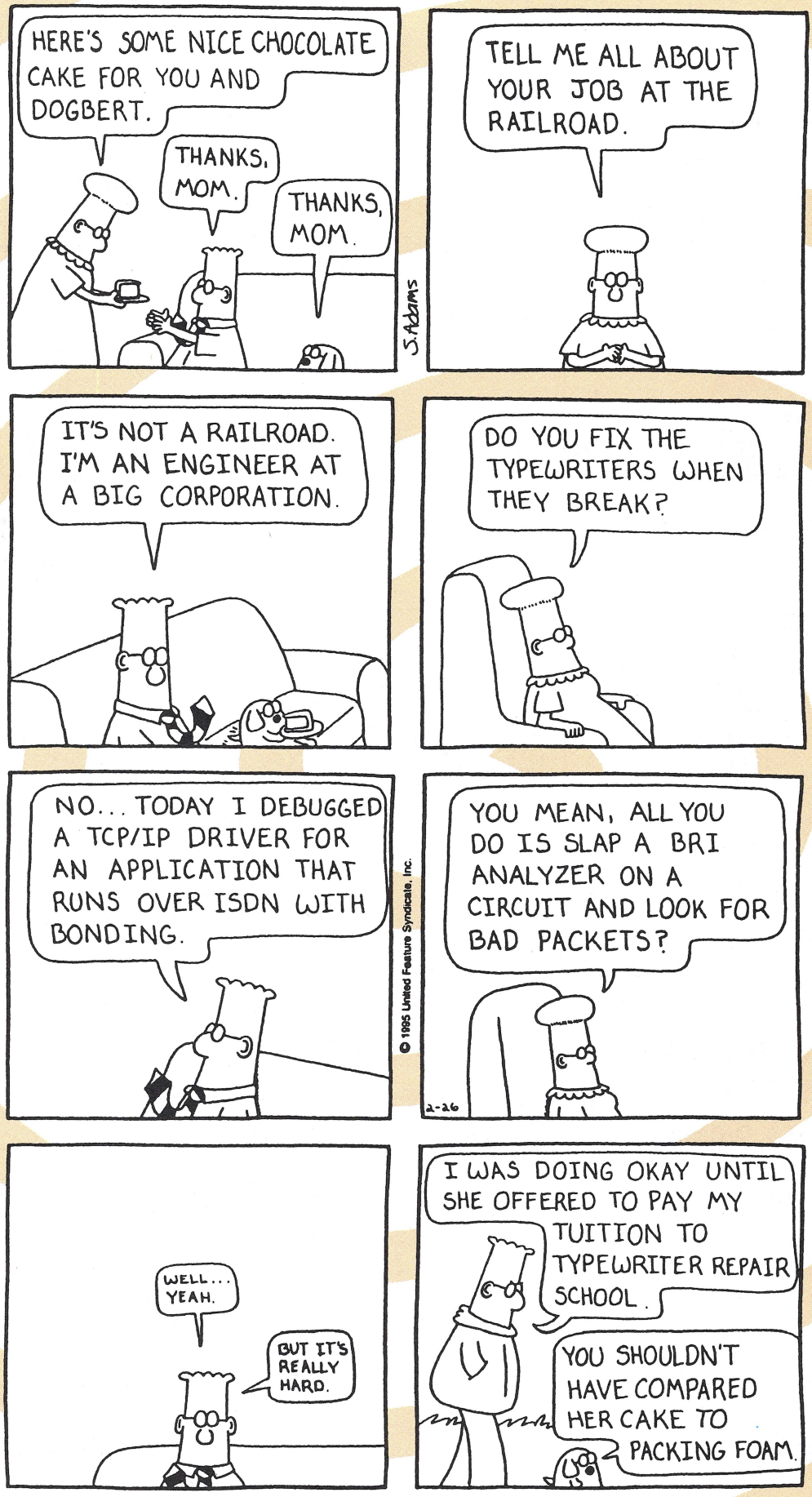


The end is near.



I know a woman who threatened her boyfriend by saying she would get an "additional" boyfriend.



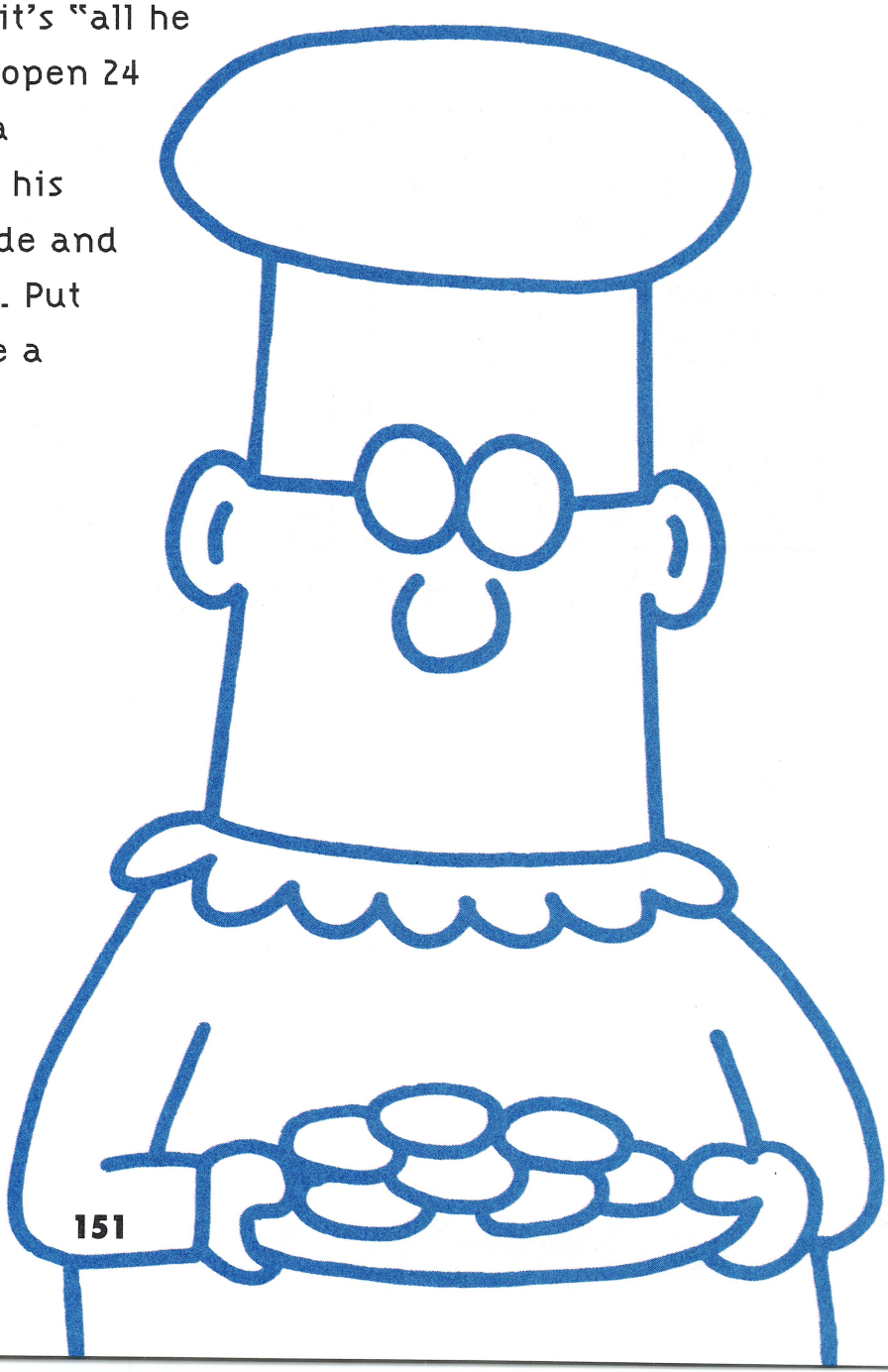


People wrote to 150 warn me that chocolate is dangerous for dogs.

MOM & DAD

Mom and Dad Dilbert's mother—"The Dilmom," as some readers call her—is one of my favorite characters. She gives us an idea where Dilbert got his skill with technology. On the outside she's a cookie-baking, fifties sort of woman. But she reveals in small glimpses an incredible depth of technical skill and understanding.

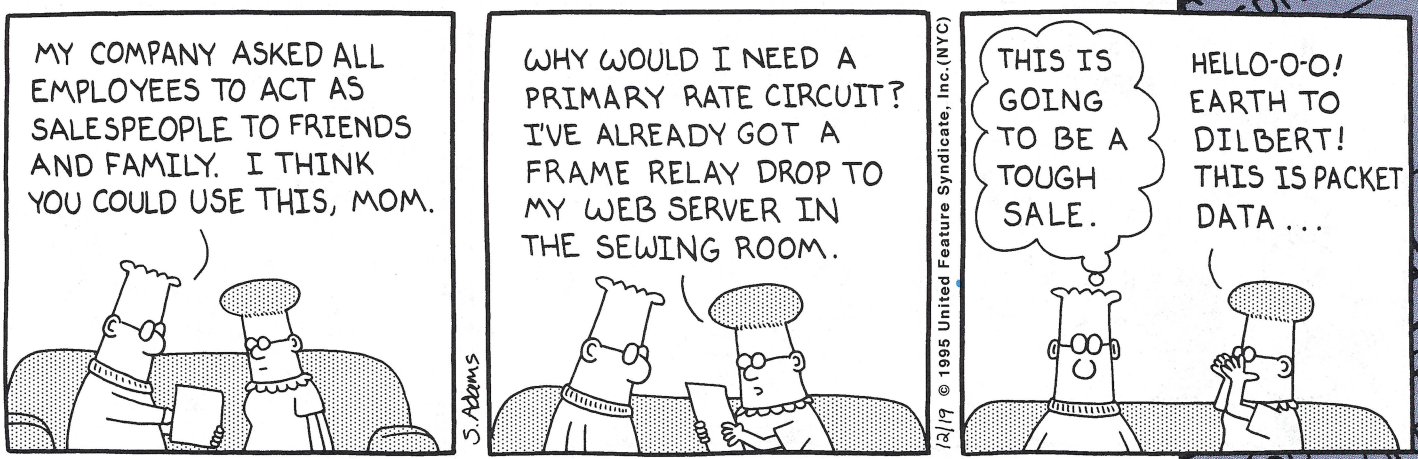
Dilbert's father has never been seen in the strip, only referred to. He has been at the all-you-can-eat restaurant in the local mall for years. He won't leave until it's "all he can eat." The restaurant is open 24 hours a day so it has been a standoff so far. Dilbert gets his brains from his mother's side and his literalness from his dad. Put them together and you have a perfect engineer.



You just need lots of them.

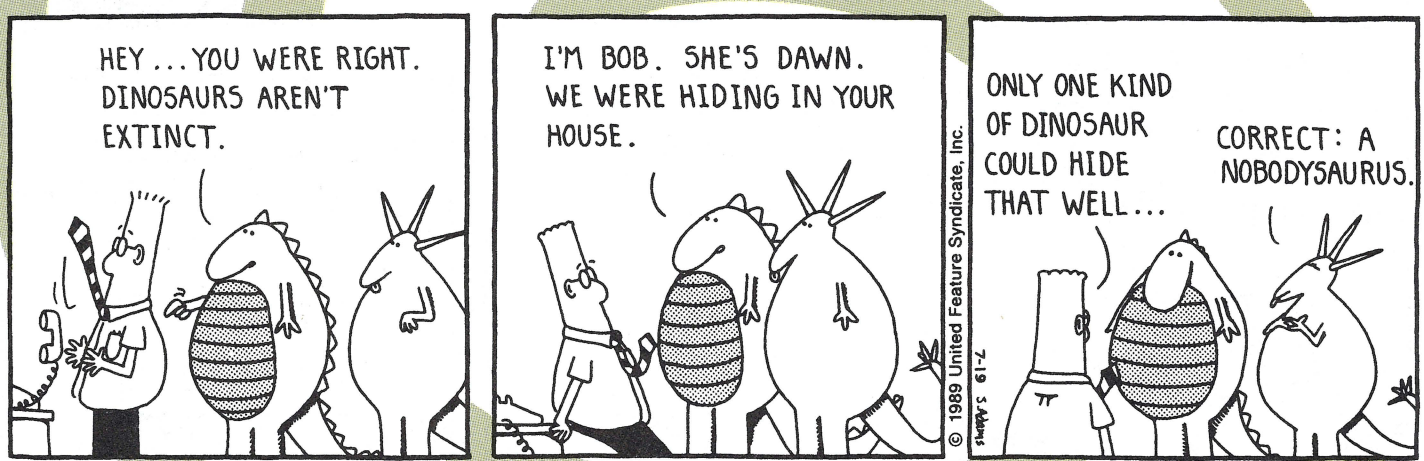
That's her hair, not a weird hat.

You can't tell if they're pulling Liz's leg. Even I don't know.



I try to make sure the reader doesn't need to know the technology to get the point. But it's funnier if you realize Dilmom has a good point.

The strip wasn't doing too well in 1989, so I was looking for a hook to draw people in.



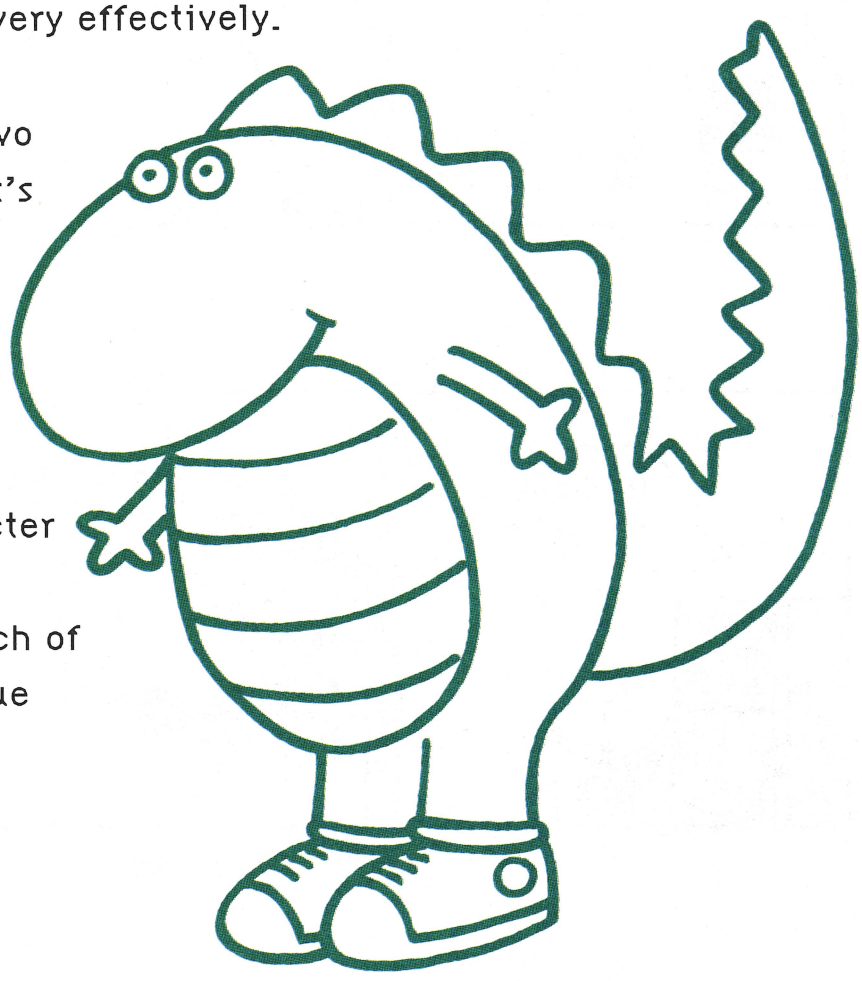
Everyone loves dinosaurs, right?

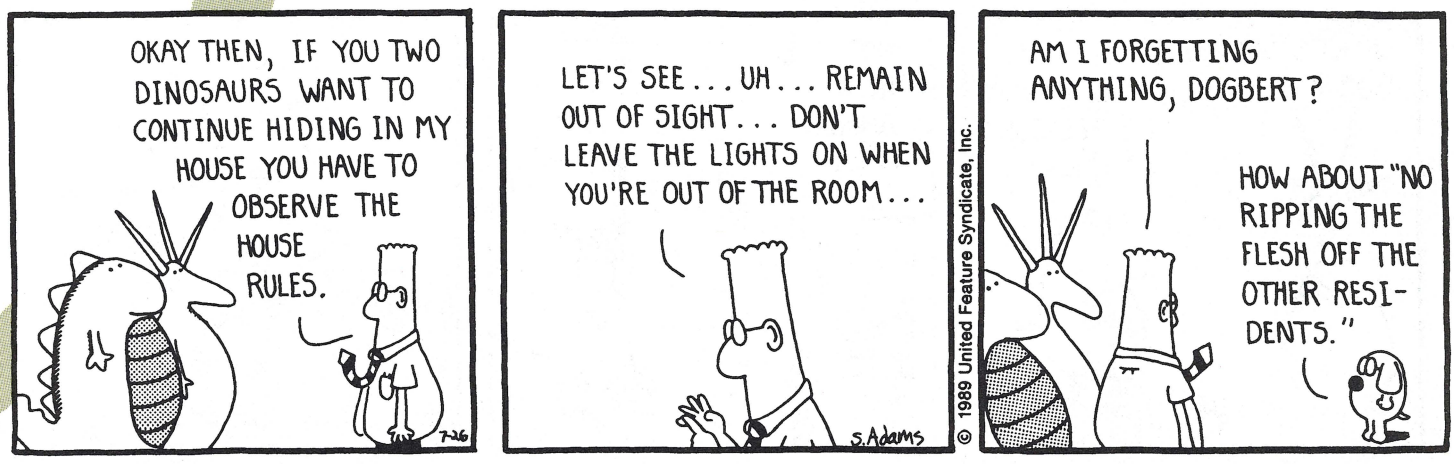
Dawn is the name of a friend of mine who has non-human thoughts on a regular basi

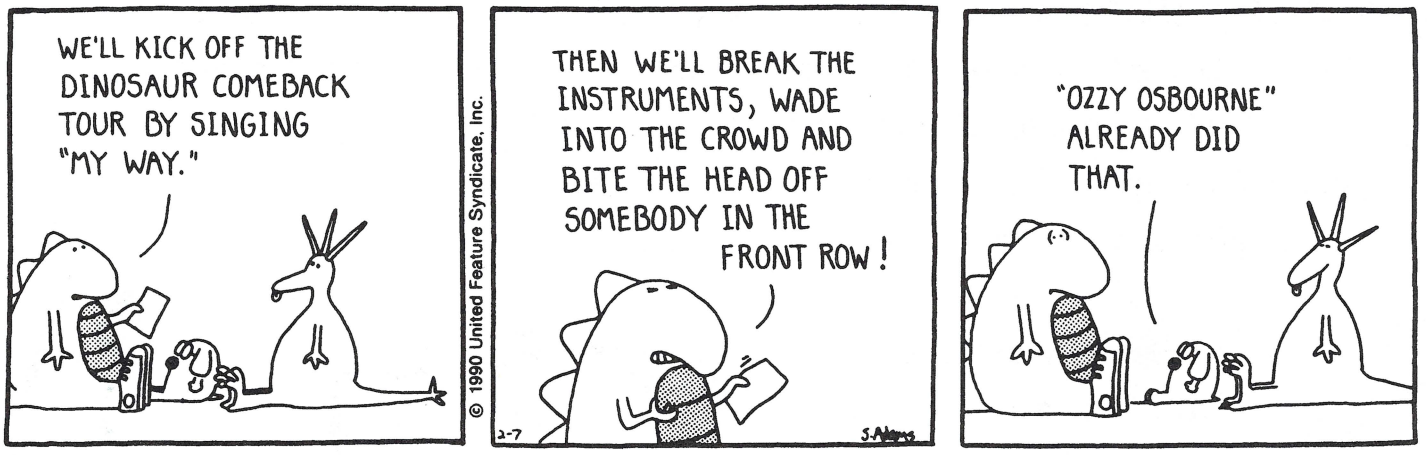
DINOSAURS

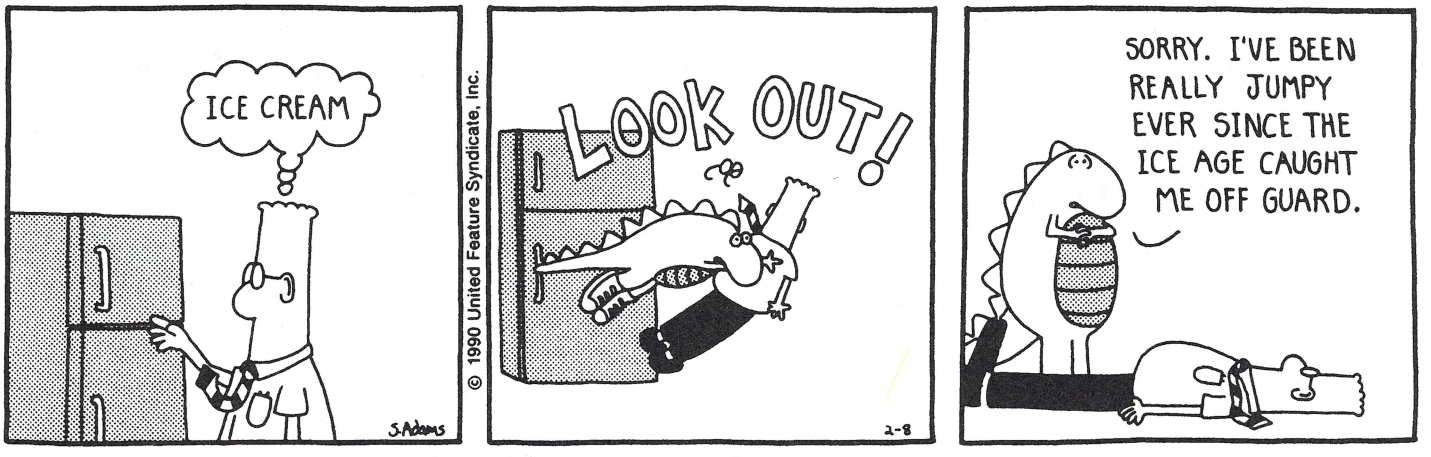
Bob, Dawn, and Rex the Dinosaurs emerged after Dilbert calculated it was impossible for all dinosaurs to be extinct—therefore they must be hiding. And they were, in people's houses. Dinosaurs turned out to be smaller than we thought and able to hide very effectively.

Bob and Dawn were the two dinosaurs living in Dilbert's house. Later they gave birth to little Rex. Bob is dumb and easily excited. His favorite activity is giving wedgies to people who deserve it. His character is more fun than Dawn or Rex, so you won't see much of Bob's family. They continue to hide.



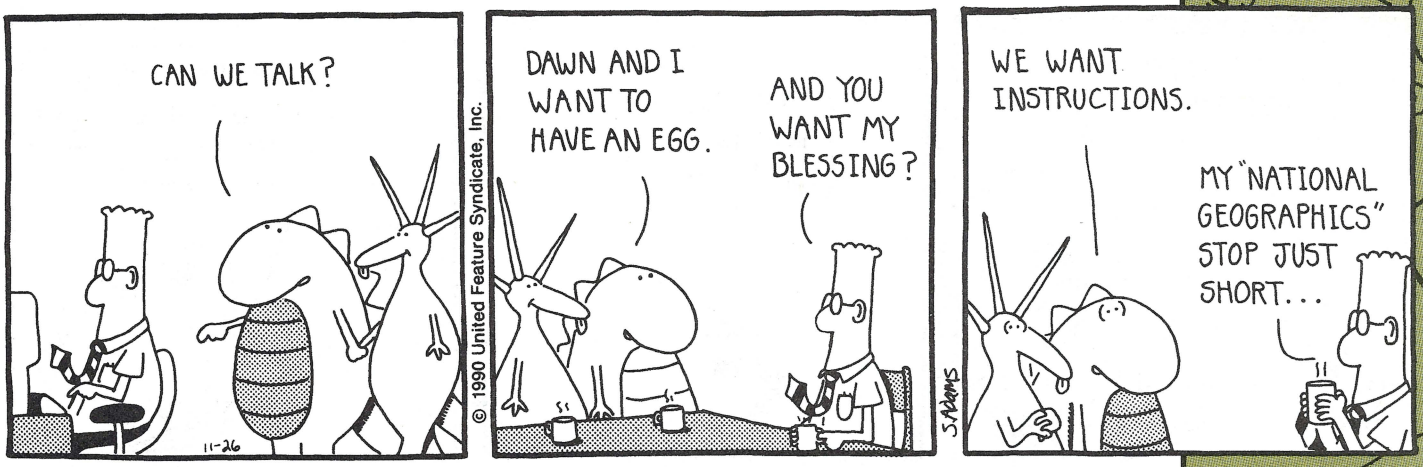






A rare action sequence.

I used to have that problem.

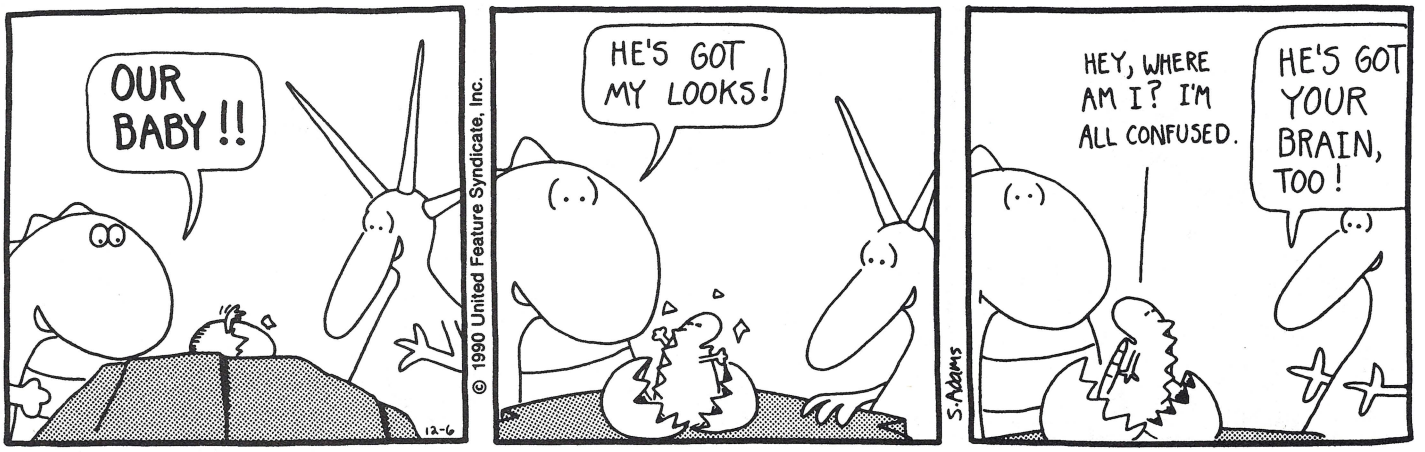


If nobody taught humans how to mate, could they figure it out on their own?

The reference desk librarian knows everything!

Dinosaurs invite dumb jokes. It's not my fault.

I'm glad I wasn't born in an egg. It looks uncomfortable.



Rex is the name I would give myself if that were a graceful option.

Yikes! I just realized <u>today</u> is Father's Day and I haven't called home yet! (Really.)

I stopped listening to adults when I was about Ten. I still don't.

DILBERT
By Scott Adams
ADD ONE JAR OF SPAGHETTI SAUCE...
HMPH
GRRR
UNH
RRRRR
LET ME TRY TO HUMIL-IATE YOU BY OPENING IT EASILY.
THIS DEFINITELY WOULD HAVE WORKED IN "FAMILY CIRCUS."
I'LL SEE IF BOB CAN OPEN IT.
NO PROBLEM FOR A MIGHTY DINOSAUR.
SMASH!
WILL YOU STOP HUMMING "MY WAY."
S.Adams
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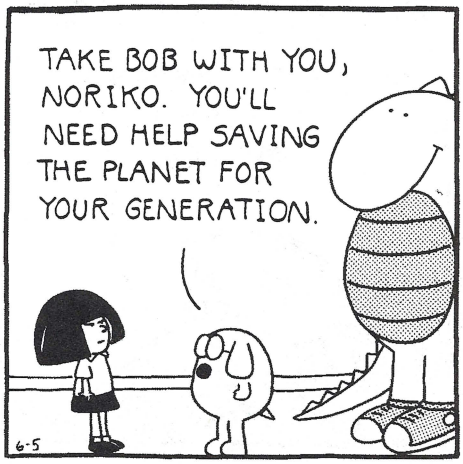
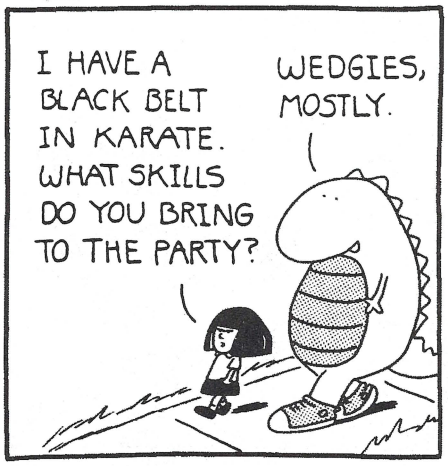
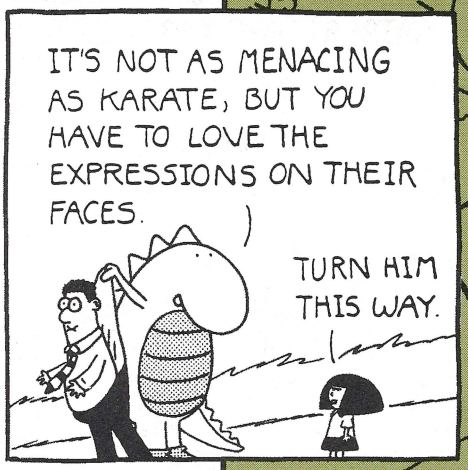
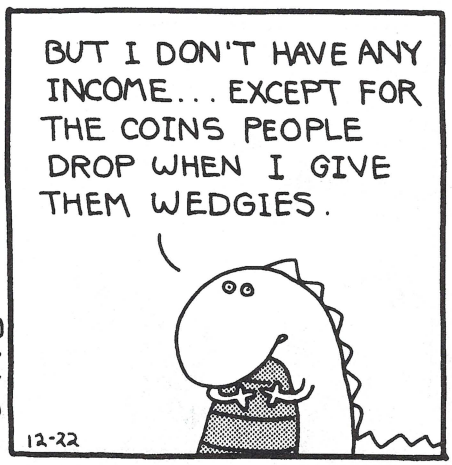


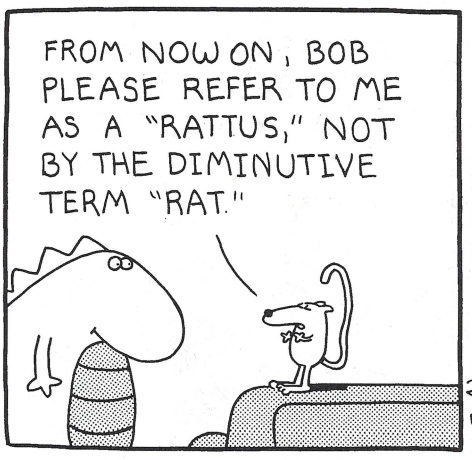




Maybe Bob is a "wedgie-sore-ass."



The tongue really sells this one.



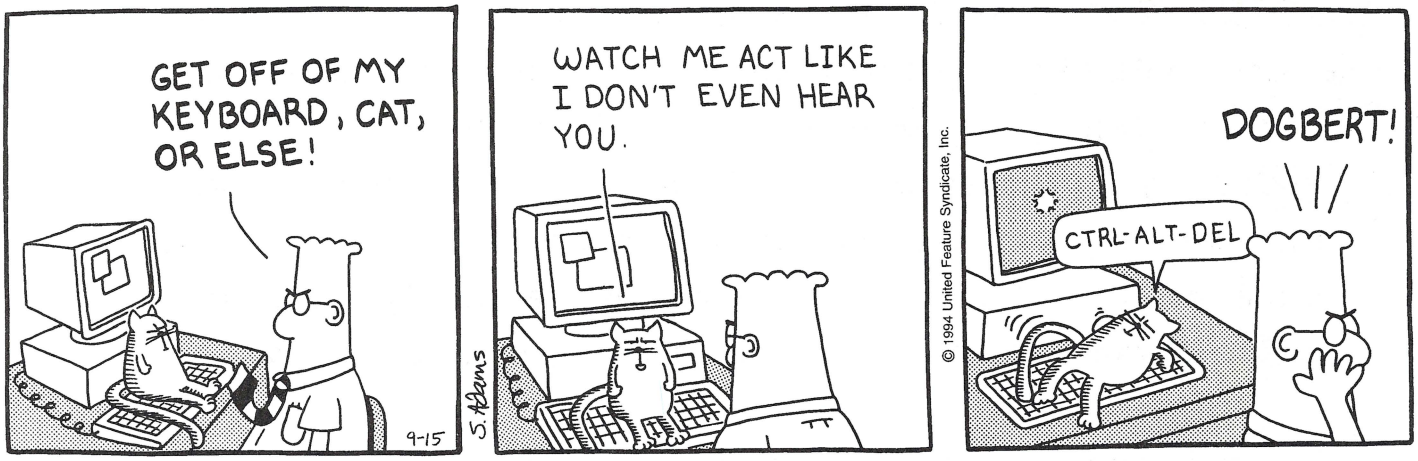
This is the first appearance of Catbert.

Cat owners understand that cats love to get on keyboards, other people were confused by this one.

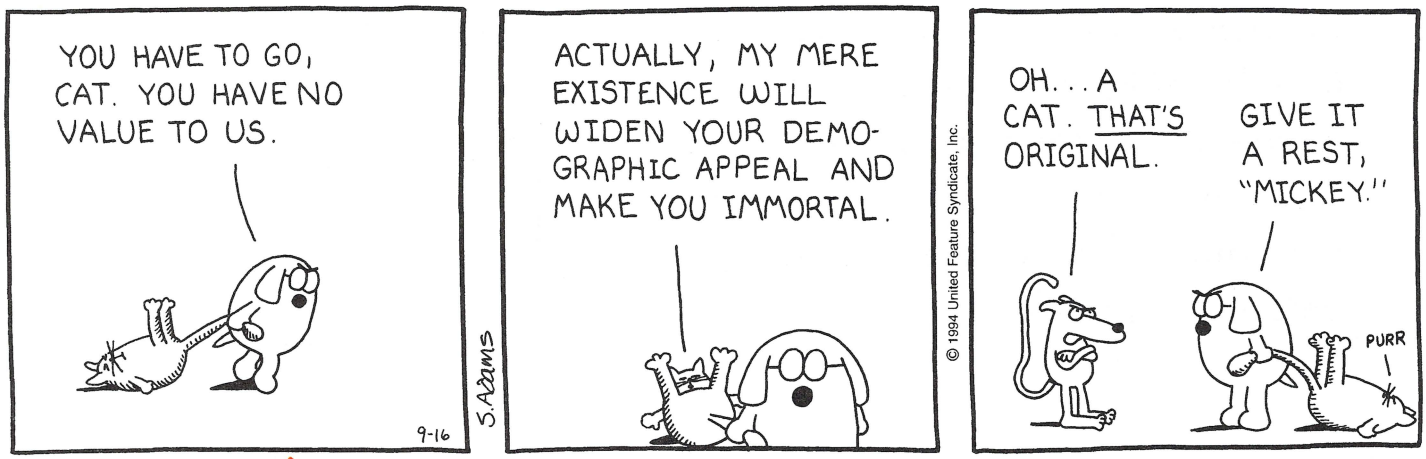
CATBERT

Catbert was introduced for one series of strips involving an attack on Ratbert. I had no plans to keep the cat character. When readers saw him they wrote hundreds of e-mail messages requesting "more Catbert." The funny thing was, I had not named this character, yet everyone referred to him as Catbert. It seems to me that when hundreds of readers spontaneously and unanimously name a character for you, it's a good idea to keep him.

The challenge was figuring out how to integrate Catbert into the **Dilbert** world. I didn't want him to live under Dogbert's roof, and most of the action was happening in Dilbert's office. One day in the shower, inspiration came. I decided to make Catbert the Director of Human Resources at Dilbert's company. It's the perfect fit. Like H.R. directors, cats don't care if you live or die. And they enjoy playing with you before downsizing you.

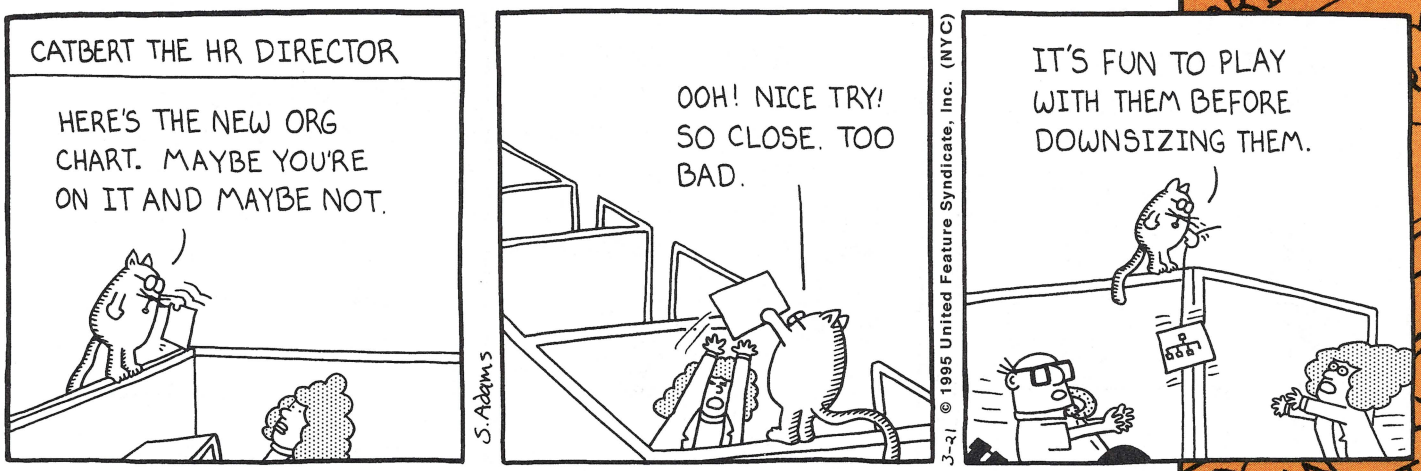


Catbert is fashioned after my fat gray cat, Freddie.

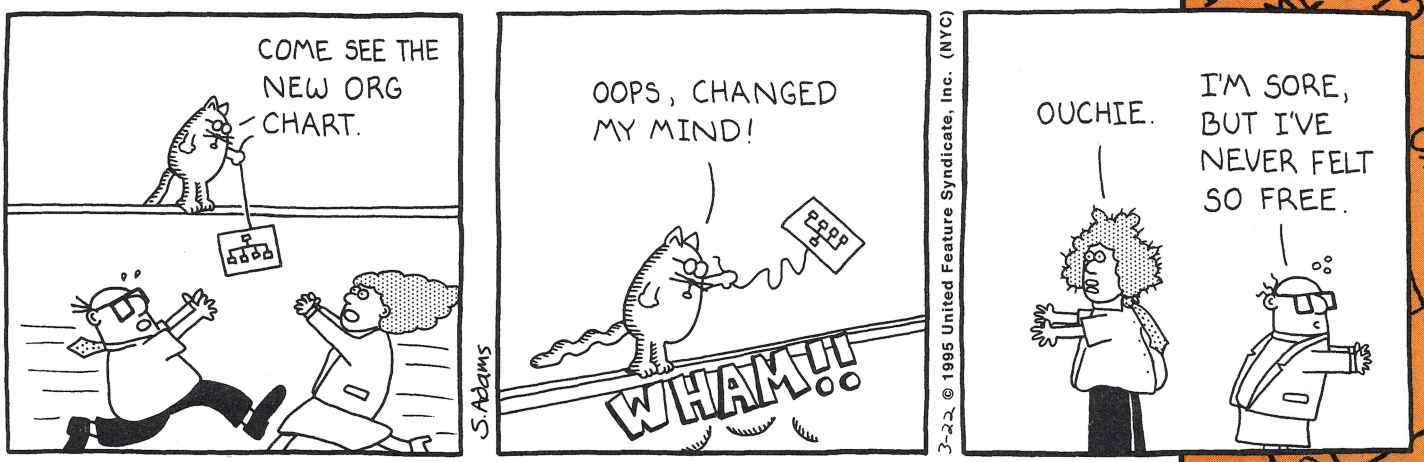


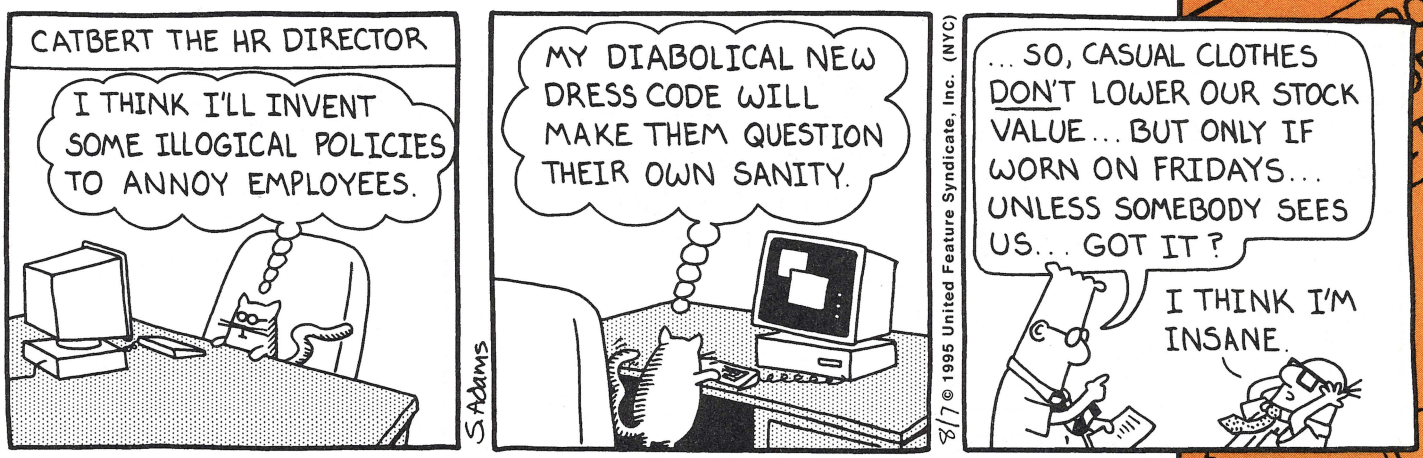
I worried that adding a cat was not very original. But then I realized nothing else in the strip was original either, so I got over it.

Catbert has become a virtual mascot for Human Resources employees.



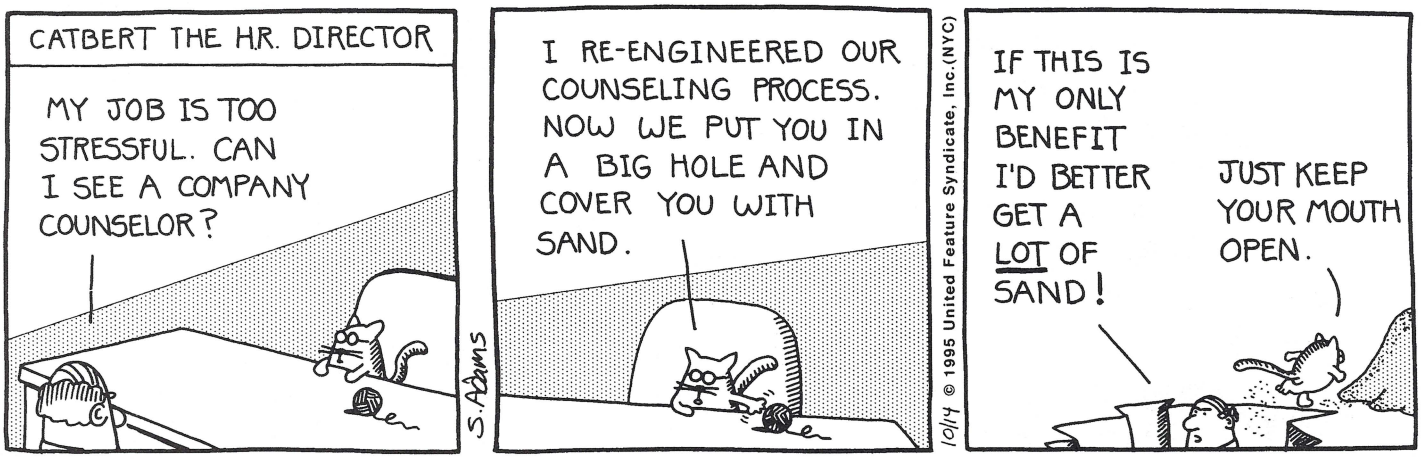
Those aren't stripes on his back, just shading.



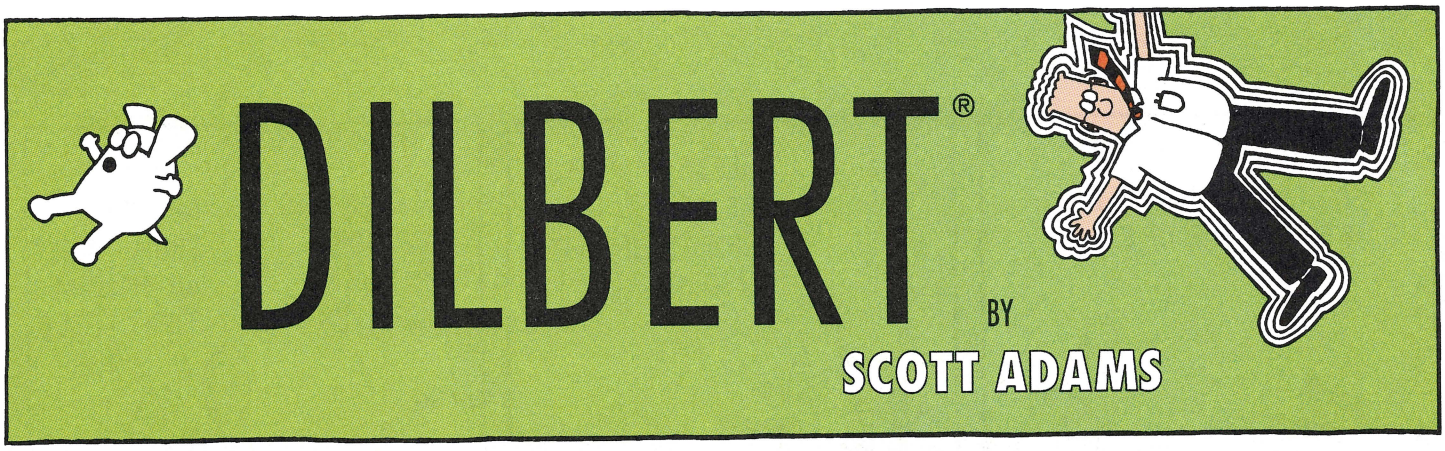


I know the concept of dress codes was invented by a cat.

Who decided that jeans are not business clothes? It seems like a random decision to me.

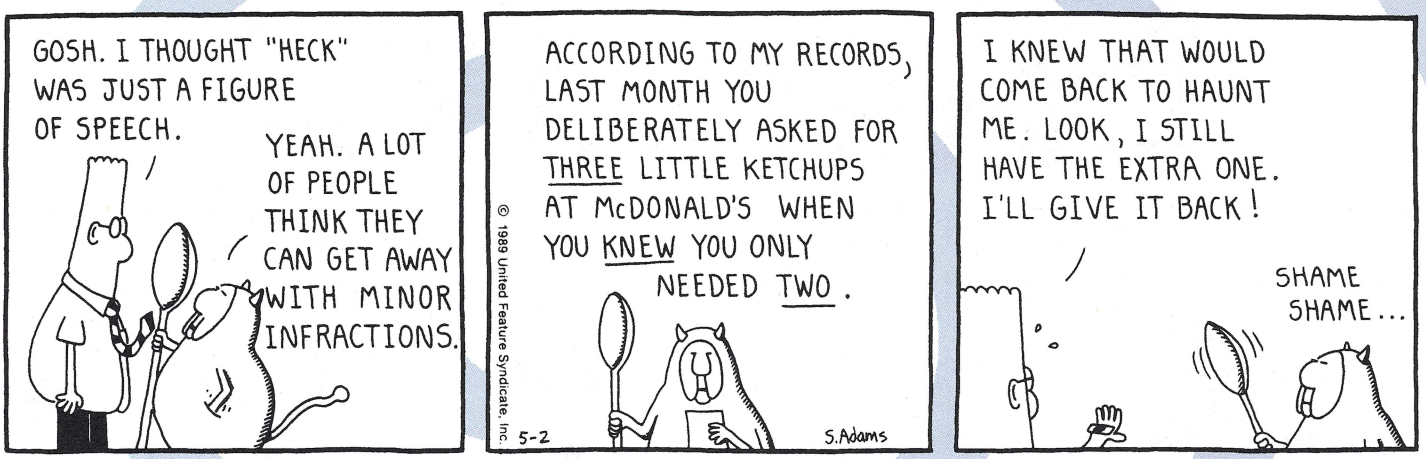


Many employees have been plagued by "dotted line" bosses. I know I was.



The "Total Compensation" concept is pulled from real life. It sounds much → 167 → better than "pay cut."

This is the first strip with Phil, The Prince of Insufficient light.

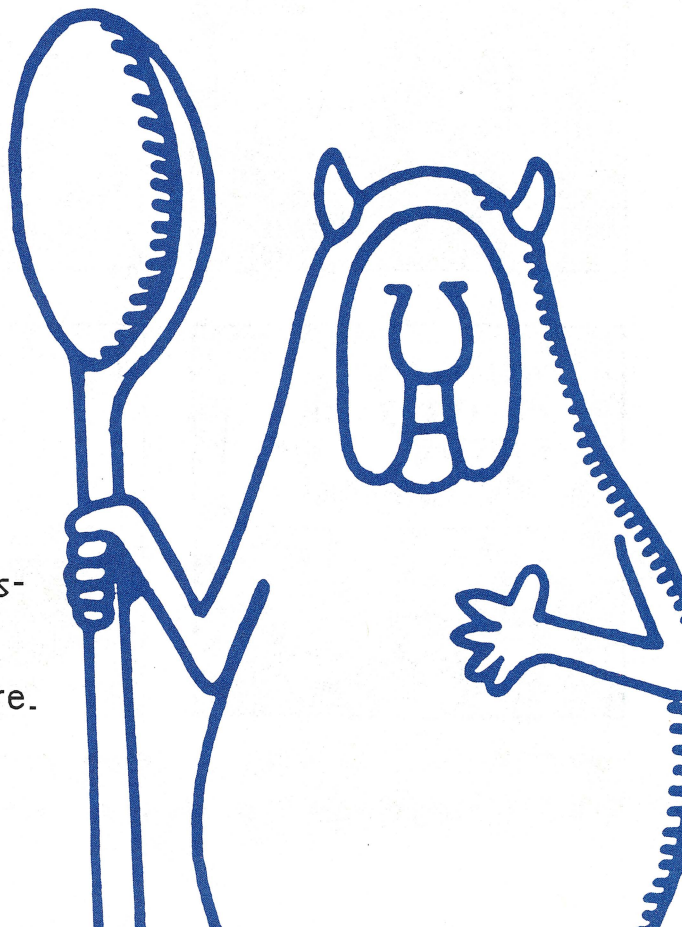


Can you tell he's holding a big spoon? It's not as scary as a pitchfork.

Phil, The Prince of Insufficient Light

In my first year of syndication I tried to introduce Satan as a regular member of the **Dilbert** cast. My editor at United Media wisely advised against anything that would make me look like a Satan-worshiping cartoonist. (It doesn't take many complaints for a newspaper editor to decide to drop a new strip.) But I really wanted the devil character so I argued my case. After some negotiations, I ended up compromising and softening the character to its current form—Phil, Ruler of Heck, Prince of Insufficient Light. He wouldn't damn you, but he might darn you for minor infractions.

Oddly enough, the stripped-down, compromised version of Satan was much more interesting than the real thing would have been. So I'm quite pleased with the result. And to date I have not been accused of being in league with Phil, so it all worked out.

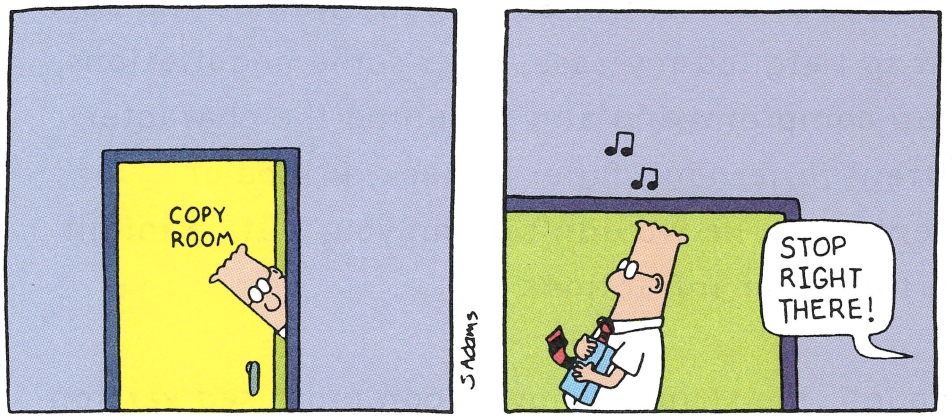


Many people who started reading **Dilbert** after Phil's introduction were confused by his occasional appearance. A number of people noted the facial similarity to the Pointy-Haired Boss and wondered if he was related. In truth, I just can't draw that many different faces, but I liked the suggestion that they might be brothers. And so it was revealed that in fact they are. I'm nothing if not flexible.

DILBERT®

BY

SCOTT ADAMS



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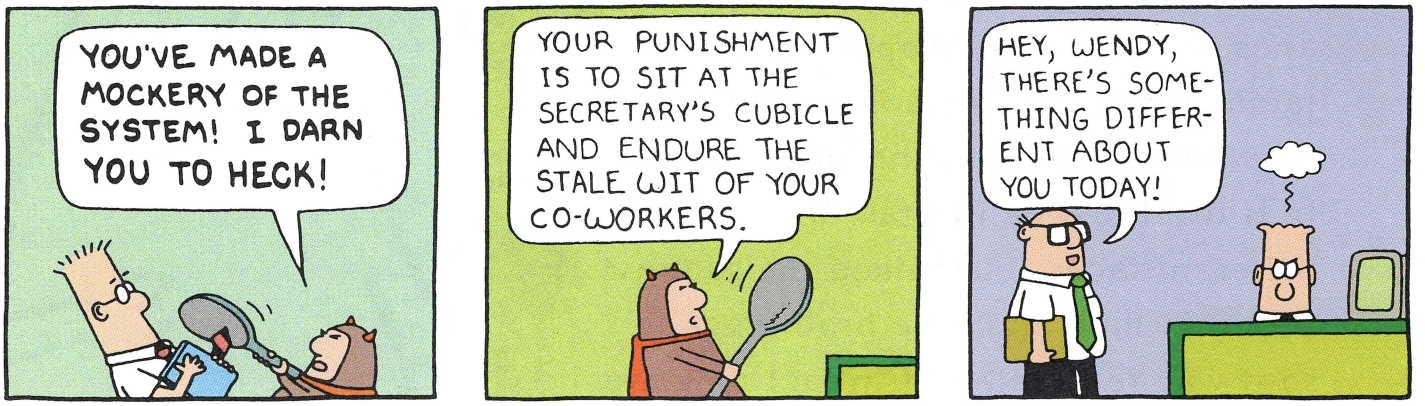
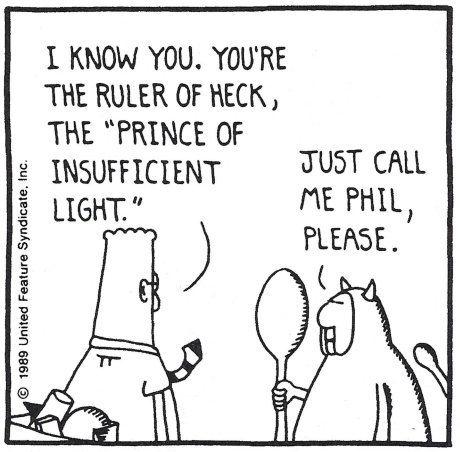
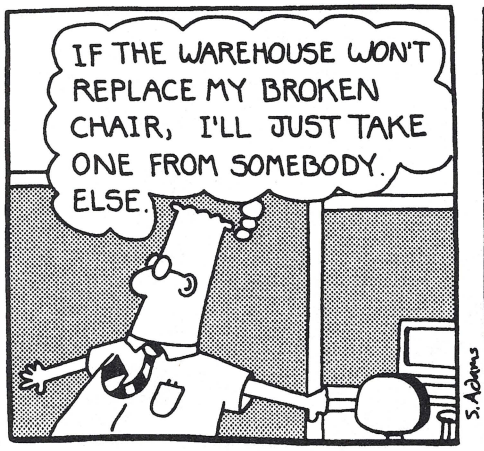
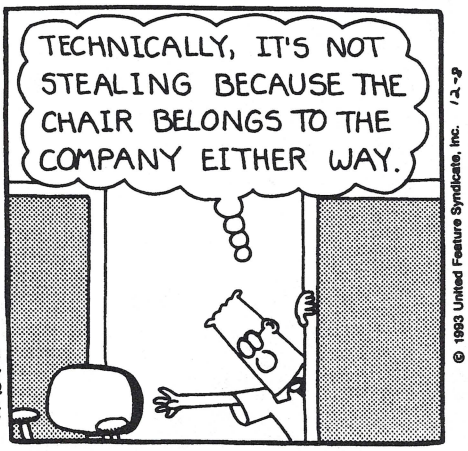
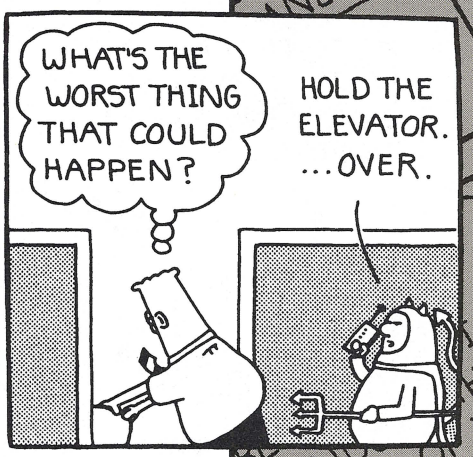


Sometimes Phil has a cape because I forget he isn't supposed to have one.



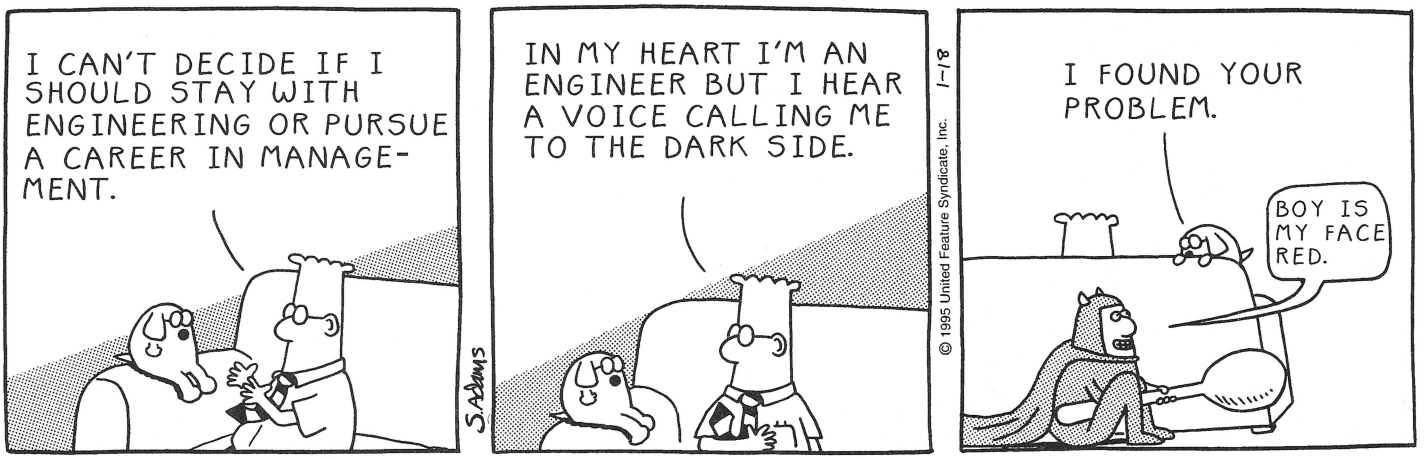




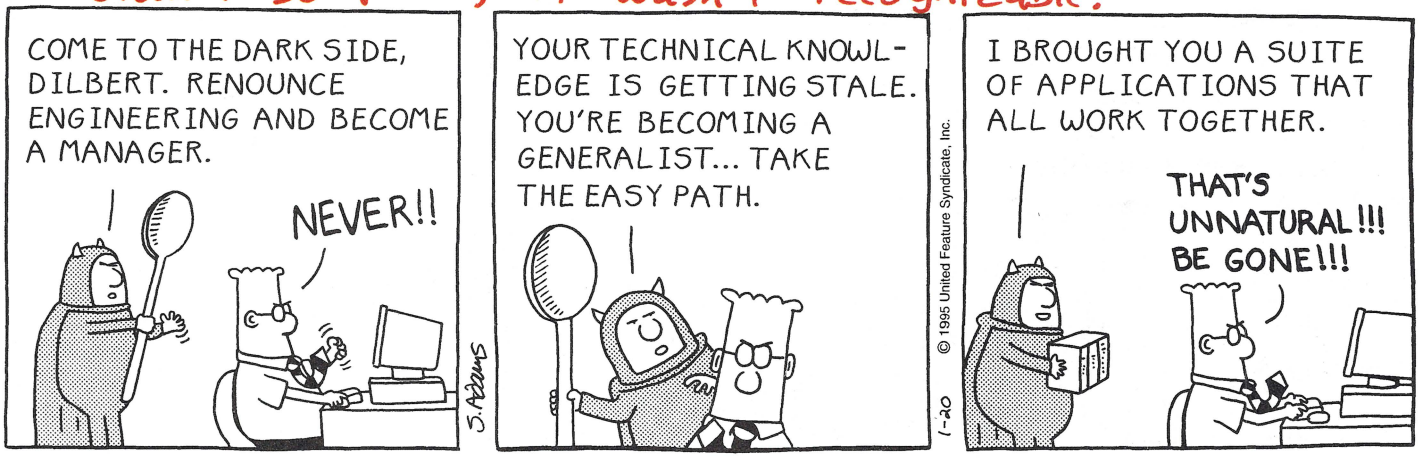


There's that cape again! And I forgot the spoon!

I even forgot to make his tail unpointy.

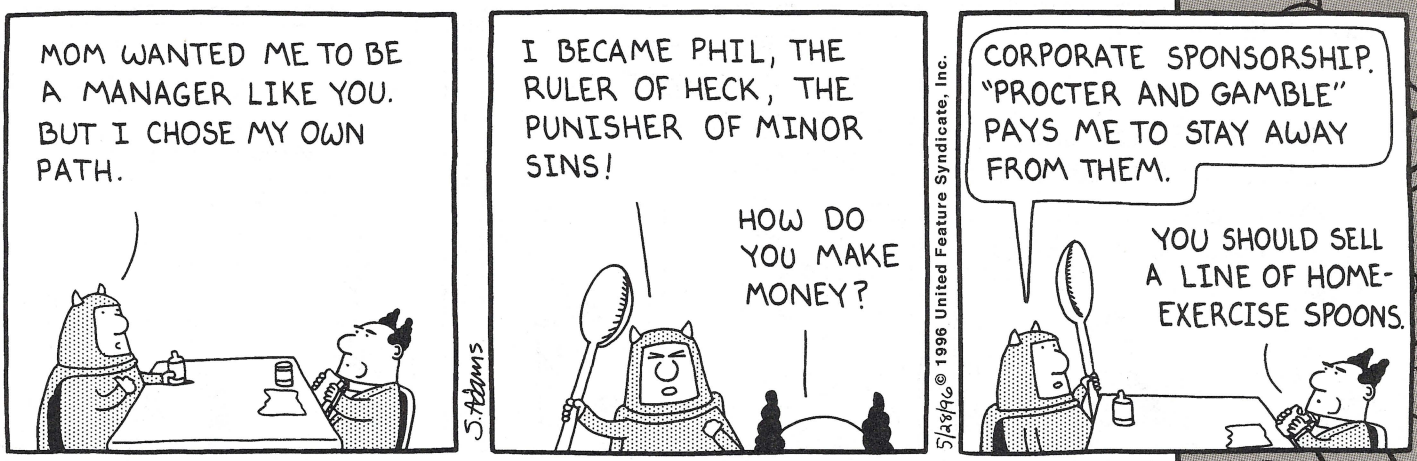


A lot of readers were confused by this strip. They hadn't seen Phil for a long time and the spoon was drawn so poorly it wasn't recognizable.



Here I was using a computer font for lettering, which is a minor sin itself.

Phil's jowl lines have disappeared, just as the boss's did.

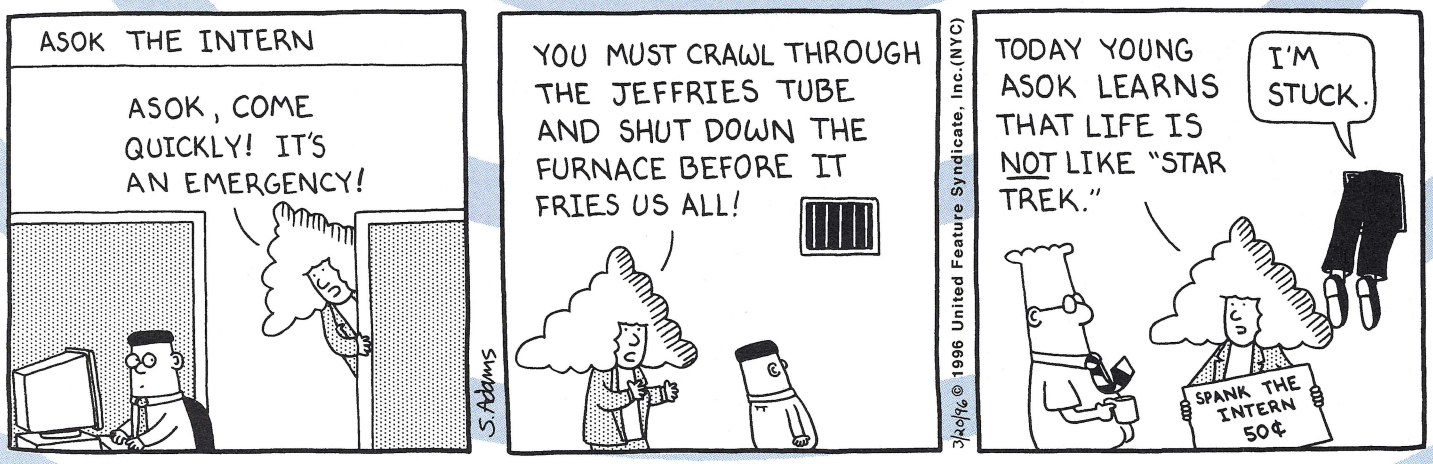


The brothers have a reunion.

I argued with my editor that nobody would think this cartoon is →173→ obscene.

Asok is named after a friend of mine from Pacific Bell. A more common spelling is Ashok.

I remember my own gradual increase in awareness about the work world.



I spelled "Jeffries" tube wrong. I was guessing.

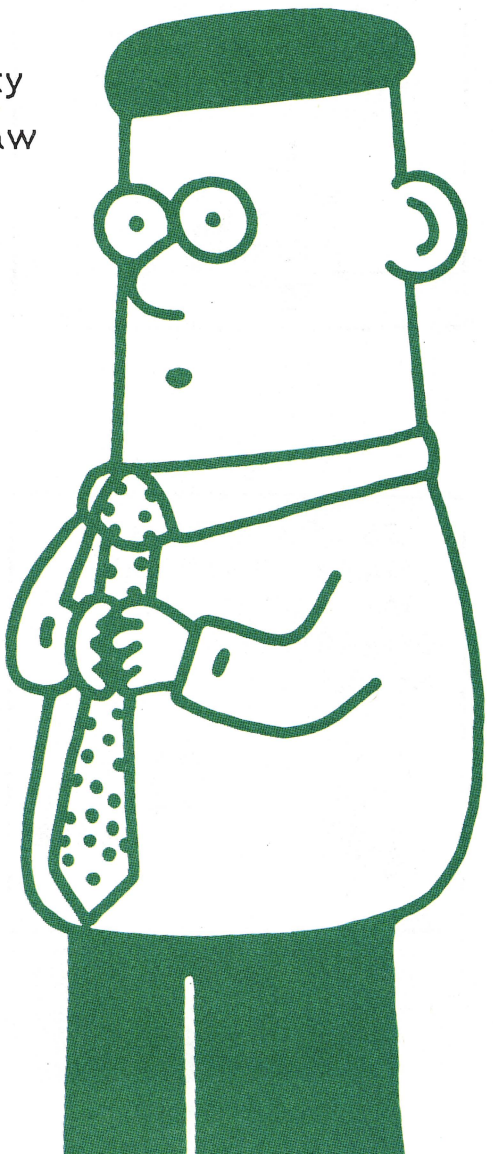
ASOK

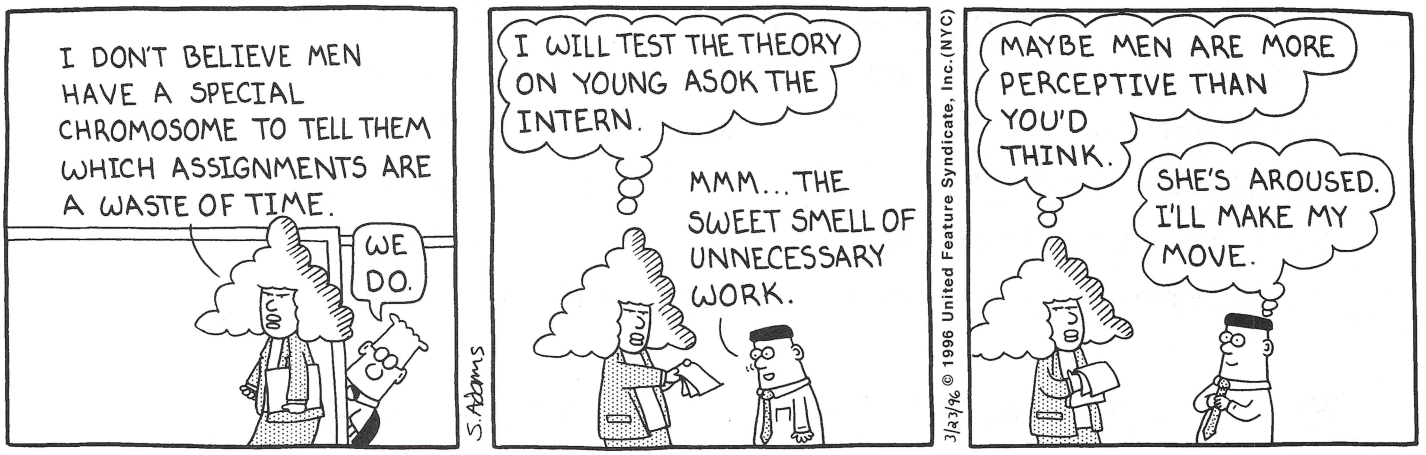
Asok, pronounced ah-shook, was introduced to satisfy the hordes of interns who wrote to request their own character. Asok is brilliant, but as an intern he is immensely naive about the cruelties and politics of the business world. The regular cast members have fun at his expense, as is common with most interns.

Asok is from India, but I haven't mentioned that in the strip yet. Only the name gives it away. Prior to Asok, I had intentionally avoided any racial diversity in the primary cast because I only like characters who have huge, gaping character flaws. The world is far too sensitive to let me get away with a highly flawed minority member.

Asok was a good way to tiptoe into the diversity water and test the temperature. Asok's only flaw is his lack of experience, which is obviously temporary. That's as cautious as you can get. But predictably, I have been flamed to a crisp for my alleged "negative stereotype of people from India."

I'm keeping Asok, flames and all. And if I get any more complaints I think I'll turn him into a drug smuggler. I've never been good at playing defense.



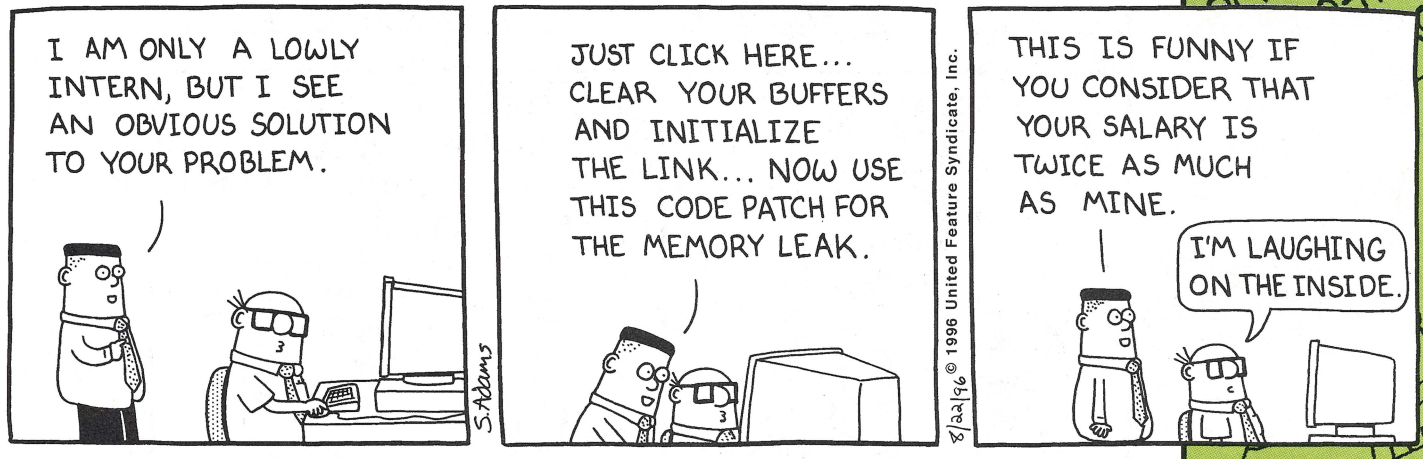


Men do have an instinct about unnecessary work. It only looks like we're lazy.

Fortunately, my publishers think this is funny.

Probably half of the people who read this didn't realize 40% is exactly normal. Others thought I didn't realize it.

Some readers did tests and found out that small fonts do save space, but not much.



DID YOU REVIEW MY DRAFT DOCUMENTATION YET?
UH... I'LL GET TO IT SOON.
S. Adams
THAT'S WHAT YOU'VE BEEN SAYING SINCE JULY!!
I KNOW I'M ONLY A LOWLY TECHNICAL WRITER AND YOU'RE A BIG IMPORTANT ENGINEER...
BUT IS IT TOO MUCH TO ASK FOR YOU TO GLANCE AT THE FRUITS OF MY LABORS?!!!
FIVE LOUSY MINUTES IS ALL IT WOULD TAKE TO VALIDATE MY VALUE ON THIS PLANET! READ IT, YOU FETID PILE OF COMPOST!!
© 1995 United Feature Syndicate, Inc.
OKAY, OKAY! I'LL READ IT RIGHT NOW!
THESE PAGES ARE BLANK! YOU'VE BEEN BLUFFING FOR MONTHS!
3-12
I THINK I'LL GO HAVE A YUMMY COMPOST SALAD WITH DELICIOUS FETID CHEESE
I'M GOING TO LOOK UP THOSE WORDS.

Tina the Technical Writer

Do you know anyone who takes personal offense at everything you say, even if you're talking about the weather? I do. That's why I created Tina—to vent some of my frustration at people like that. I labeled her "brittle" as a shorthand for her tendency to be easily offended.

I wanted some gender balance in the strip so I made Tina female. And in order for Tina to fit into Dilbert's office I needed to give her a job. So I made her a Technical Writer. (The job involves translating technical jargon into clear writing for instruction manuals, technical reports, and that sort of thing. Most engineering offices have at least one Technical Writer.)

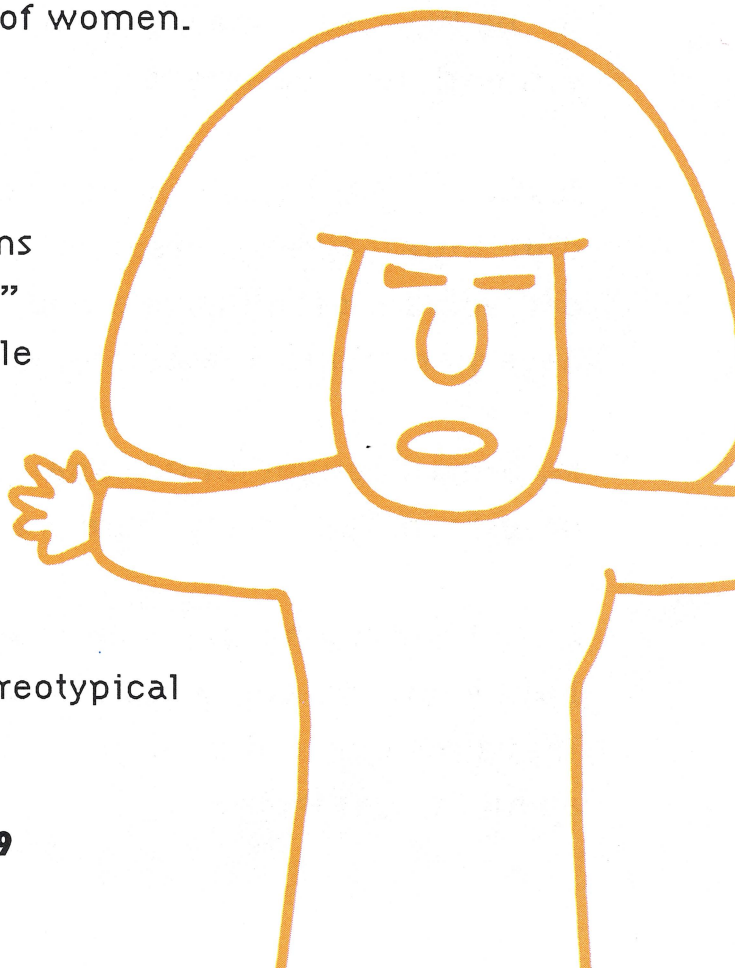
When Tina first appeared in the strip my e-mail turned into a river of flame. Technical Writers blasted me for maligning their profession. Women and men alike blasted me for what many considered a negative stereotype of women.

I knew I had a winner here.

I was fascinated by the accusations that Tina was a "too stereotypical" female character. It raises a couple of interesting questions:

1. Who says "brittle" is a female stereotype?

2. Is it possible to create a nonstereotypical character?



Apparently there's a list of stereotypes somewhere and under the female column is the word "brittle." I was unaware of this list. I can't say it squares with my own observations.

My mother was my most formative female influence. She was born of farmer stock. Mom could put a bullet through a deer's forehead at 300 yards, and did. In fact, she kept a loaded rifle behind the kitchen door to blast bunny rabbits that ventured near our garden. When she wasn't gunning down innocent mammals she was hitting baseballs to my brother and me, or beating us in tennis, or tooling around on her motorcycle.

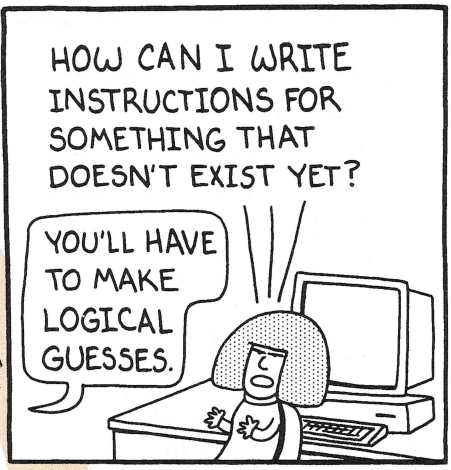
So what is this "brittle" thing I keep hearing about?

Okay, let's say the critics are right and Tina is "too stereotypical." That brings us to the next question. What would a nonstereotypical character be like? As someone from China once warned: "Be careful what you wish for. You might get it."

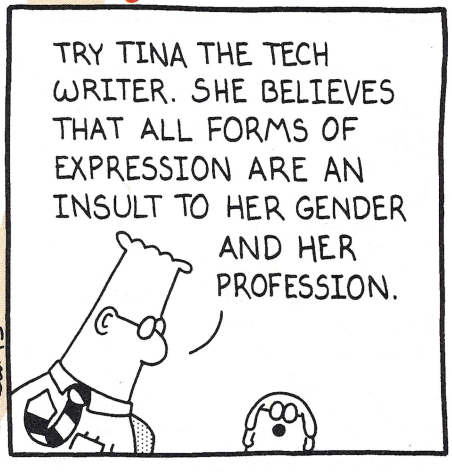
Just to stir up trouble, I created Antina (the ANtidote to TINA). Antina didn't dress like a stereotypical woman, didn't talk like a stereotypical woman, didn't have a body like a stereotypical woman, and didn't have stereotypical female interests.

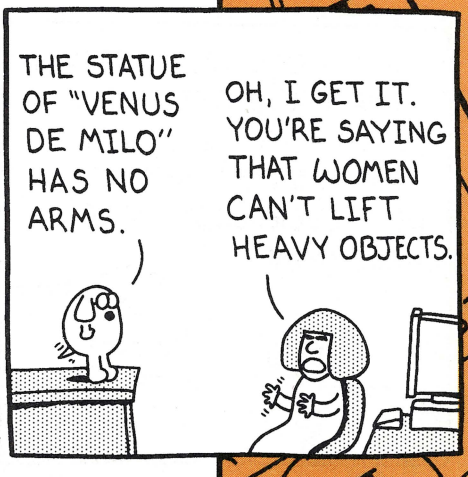
My e-mail caught on fire again. This time I was accused of making fun of lesbians. Obviously there was no safe ground in this game.

After I had my fun I got rid of Antina—she was a one joke character—but I kept Tina and will be broadening her personality over time. That's the only antidote to accusations of stereotyping, but it takes awhile to get there.

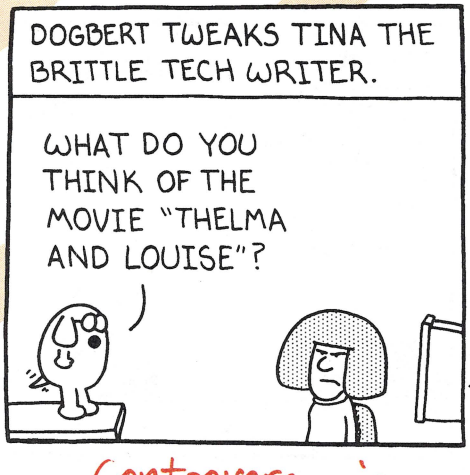


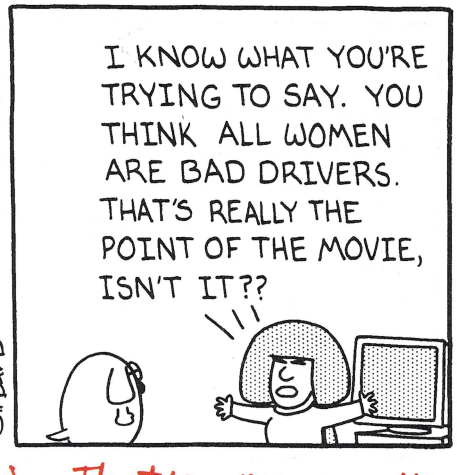
It's common to write documentation for things that don't yet exist. As you might guess, it's frustrating.





I figured I was wading into dangerous water here.

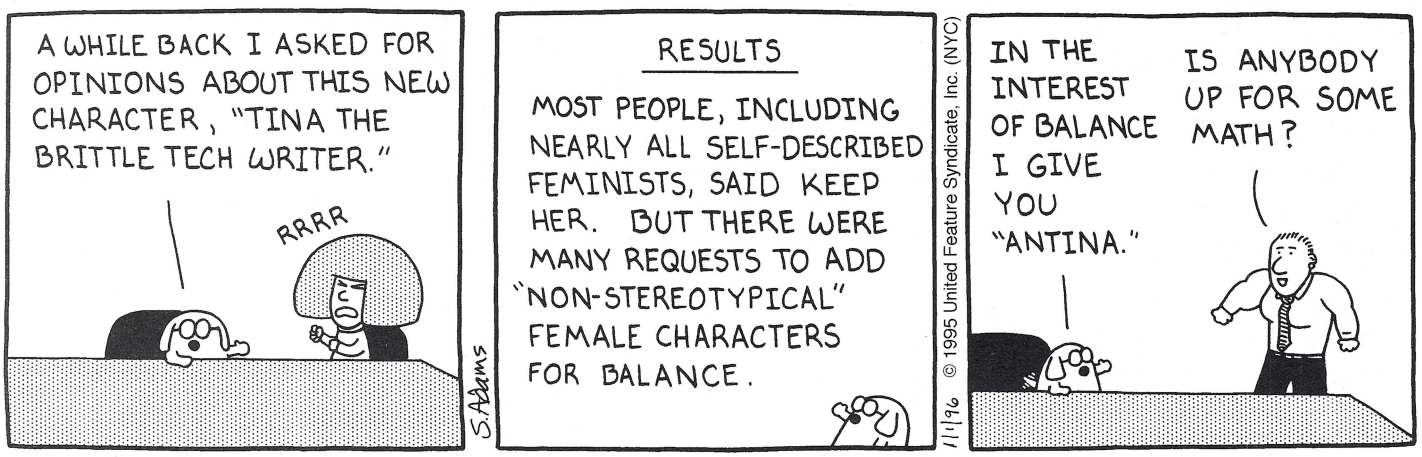


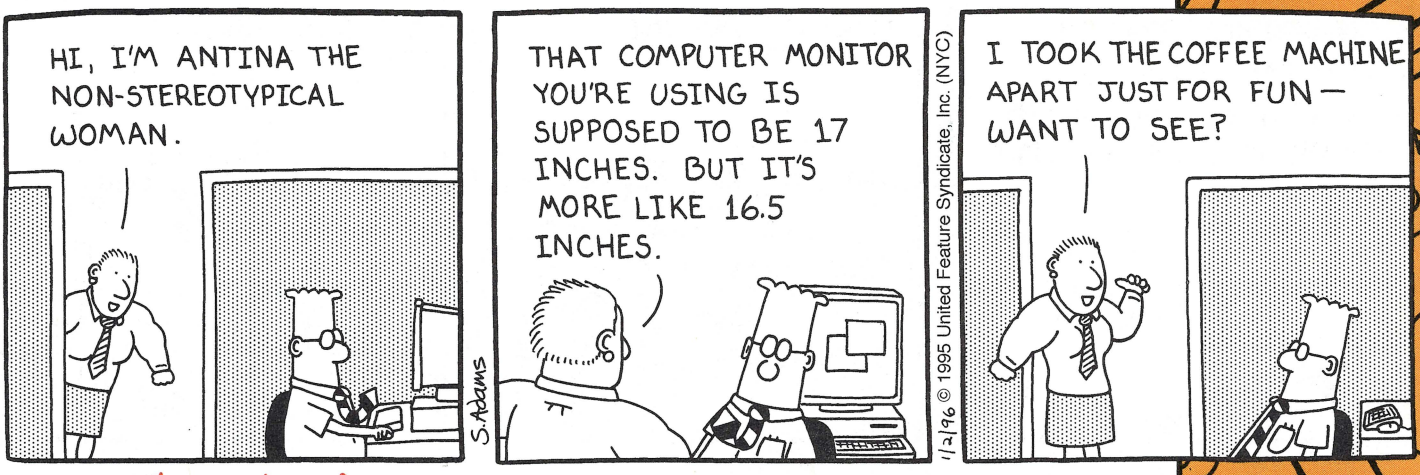


Controversy is good. That's my motto.

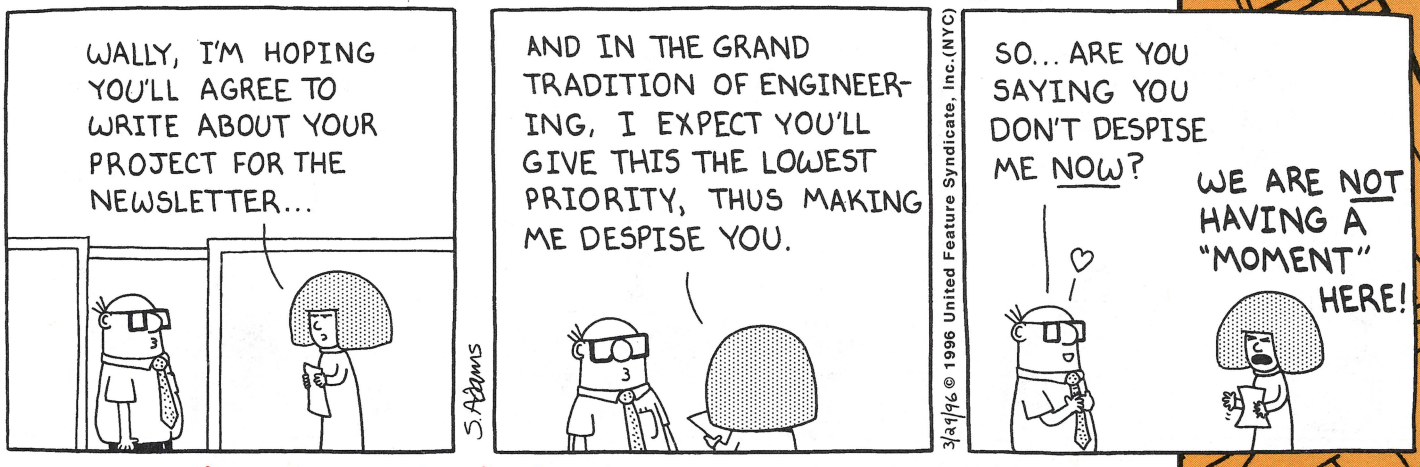
This is a pet peeve of Technical writers.

Sadly, choice "D" was very popular.



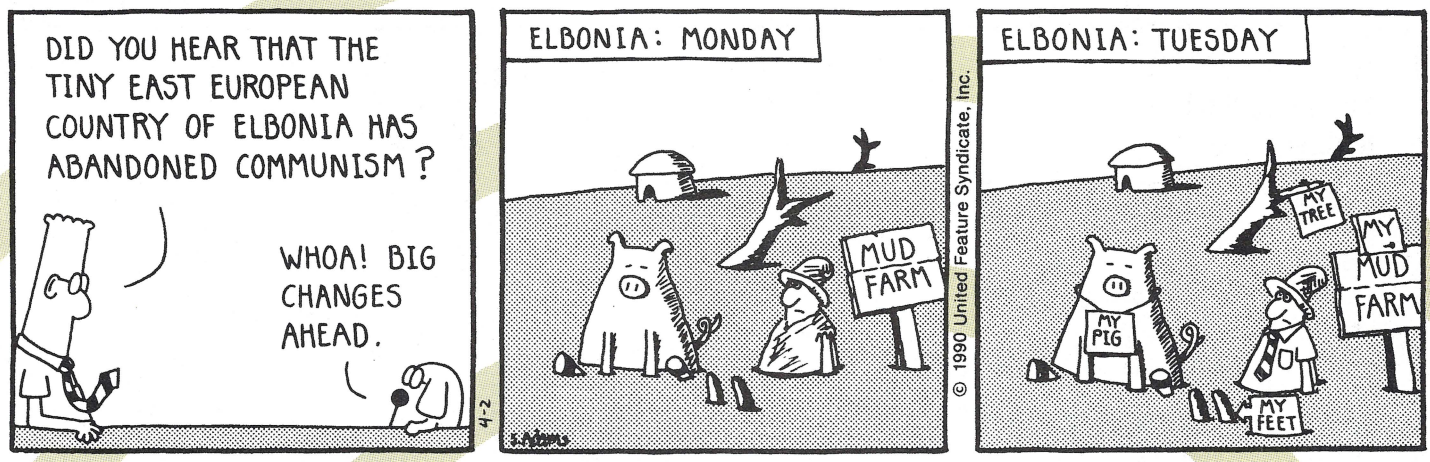


The hidden joke is that Dilbert's tie is flat by the third frame. I'm not sure what it means.

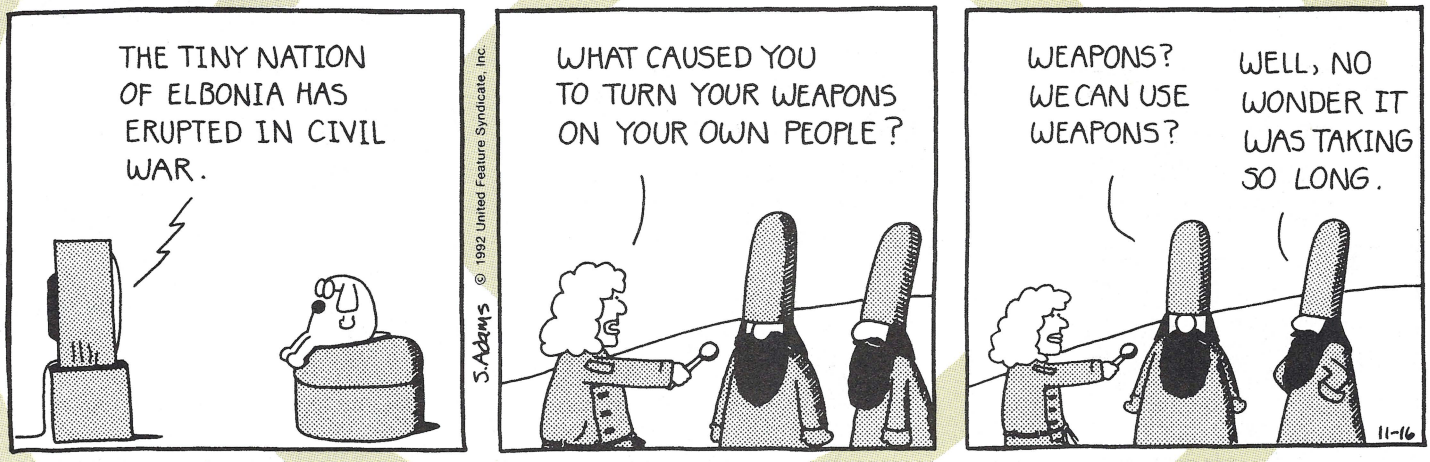


Nobody complained that Wally was being a stereotypical male here.

This is another Technical Writer's pet peeve.



This was the first glimpse of the Elbonian culture.

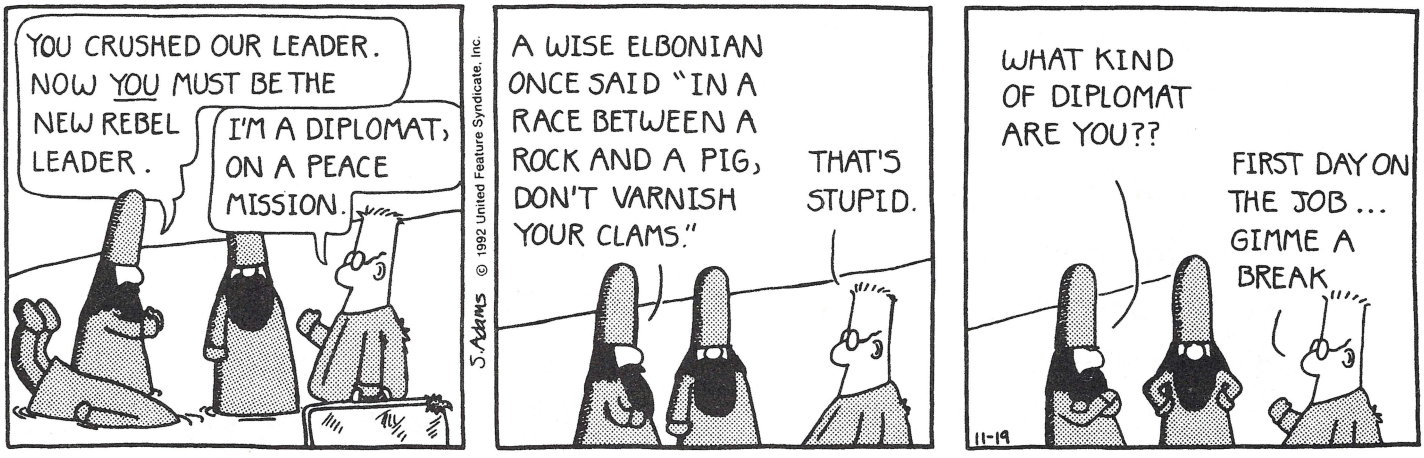


I like the idea of an entire country of idiots.

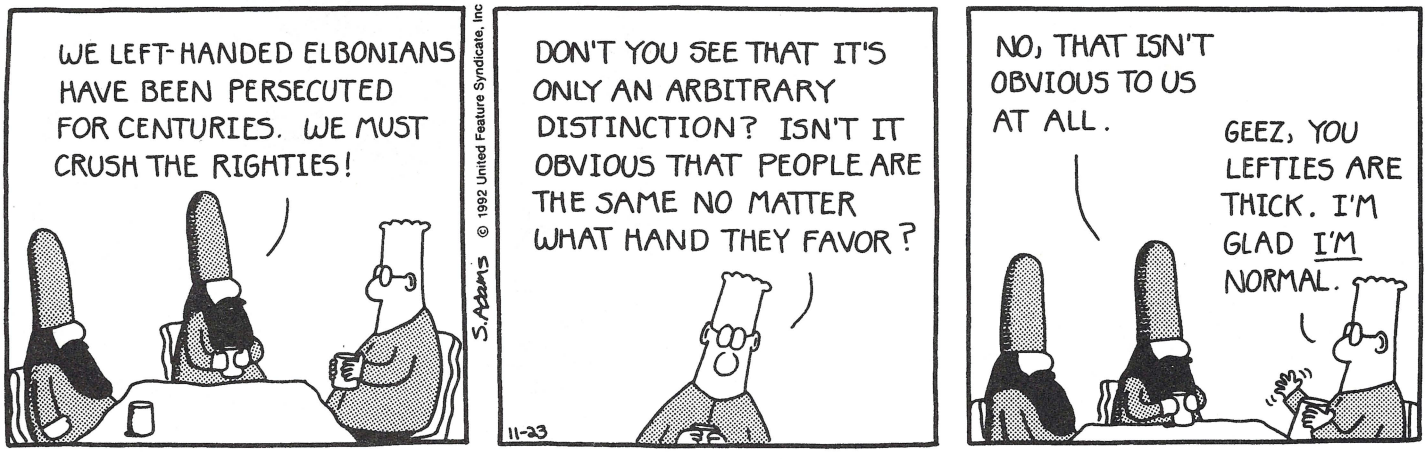
ELBONIANS

Elbonians Elbonia is an underdeveloped country that comes in handy when I want to involve a foreign location in the strip without hurting my sales of **Dilbert** overseas. People think I have some specific country in mind when I write about Elbonia, but I don't. It represents the view that Americans have of any country that doesn't have cable television—we think they all wear fur hats and wallow around in waist-deep mud.

Some people think the Elbonians are surrounded by snow, but it's mud. I can't color the mud because the Elbonians have shaded clothing and I'd lose the contrast. It's one of those bothersome trade-offs that untalented cartoonists have to make. If you want to think of it as snow, that's okay too.

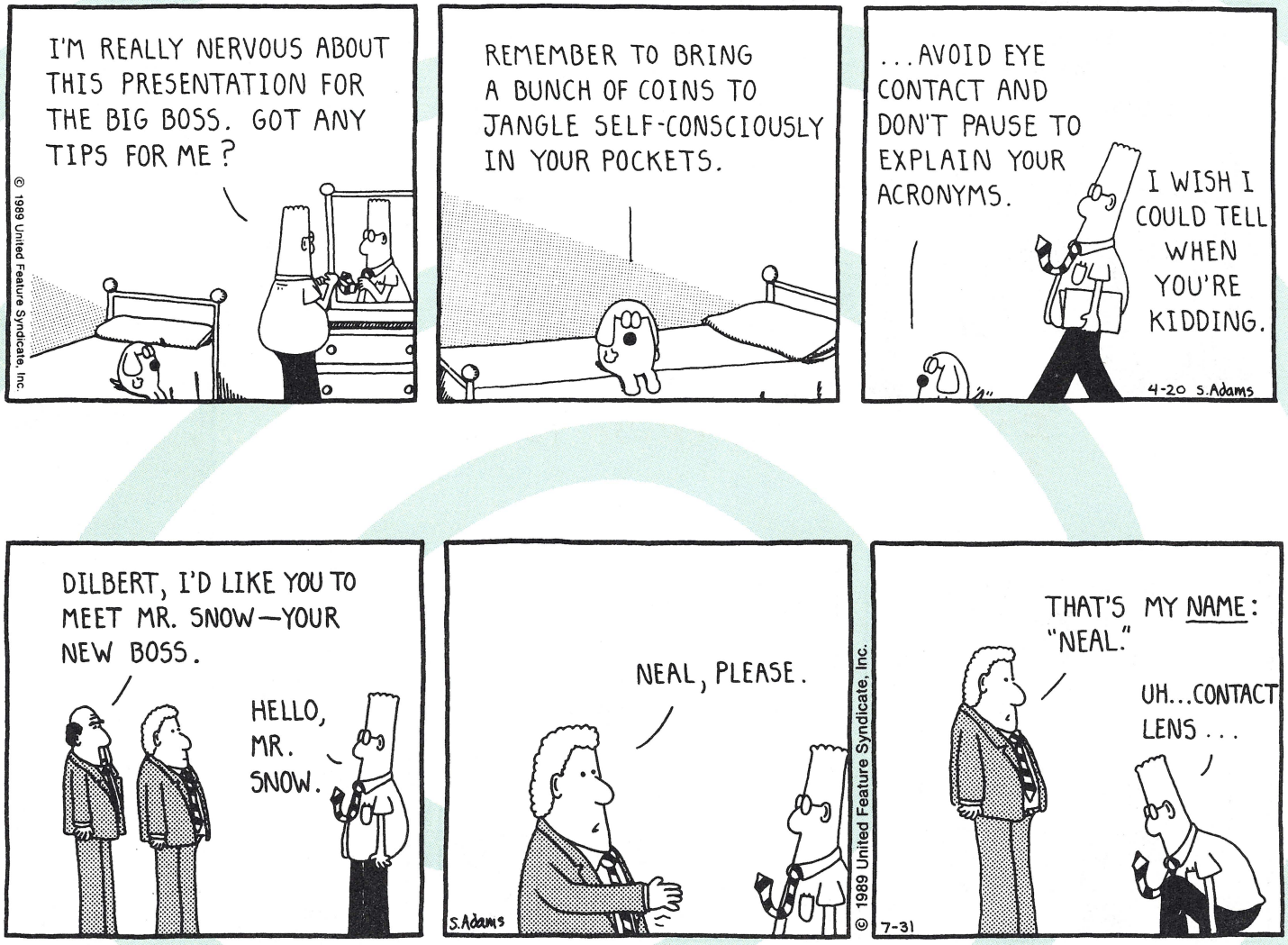


Engineers would not be good diplomats.



I'll take any excuse to draw animals.

I got complaints for using God's name in vain. I maintain it is a prayer.



In 1989, the boss was tall, thin, and not so pointy-haired.

THE BOSS

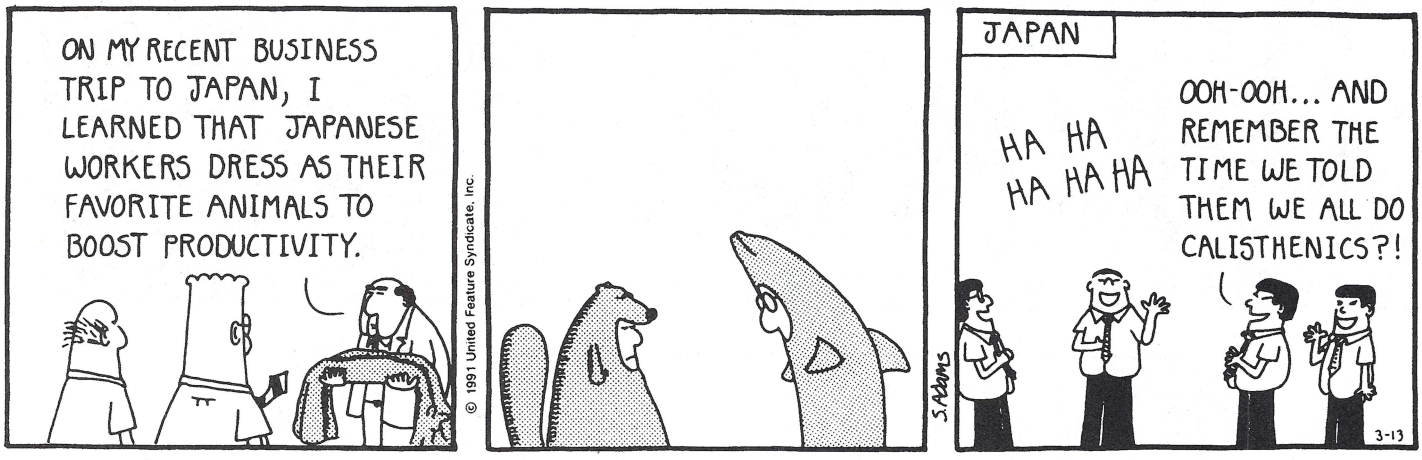
The Pointy-Haired Boss (PHB) has no other name. That's intentional. You can more easily imagine him to be your own boss if he has no name.

The original boss had jowls and nonpointy hair. He looked meaner and gruffer that way, but over time his looks and his personality evolved. Now he's more noncaring than he is overtly mean, and more clueless than gruff.

PHB's hair became pointier over time. It started as a gradual change that had no real purpose. One day I noticed it was getting pointier and I liked it. So I decided to go with it and push the hair toward full-blown, demonic horns. It fits his personality perfectly.

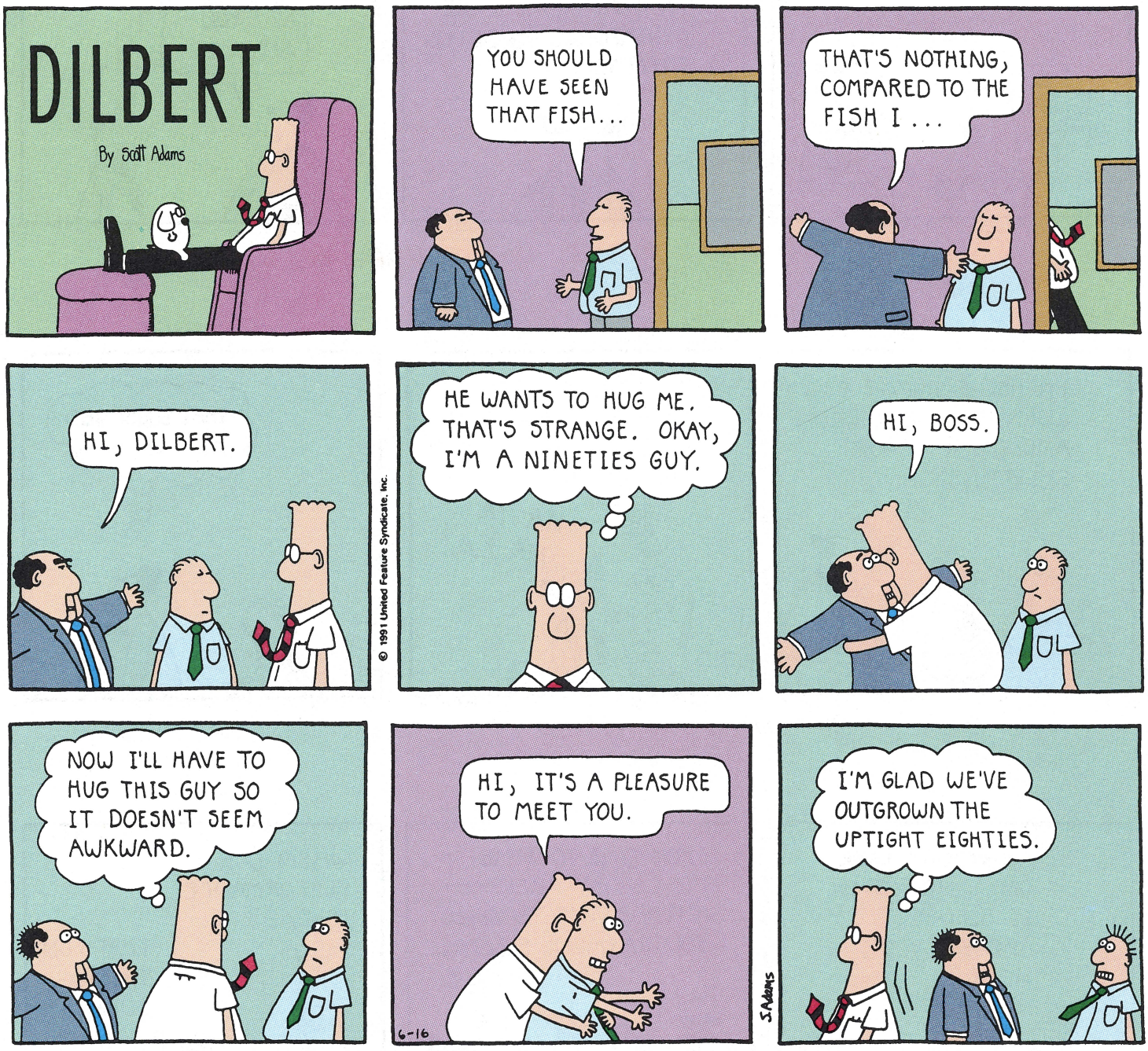
I have a sock monkey. They're great. You should get one.

He's not sadistic, just uncaring.



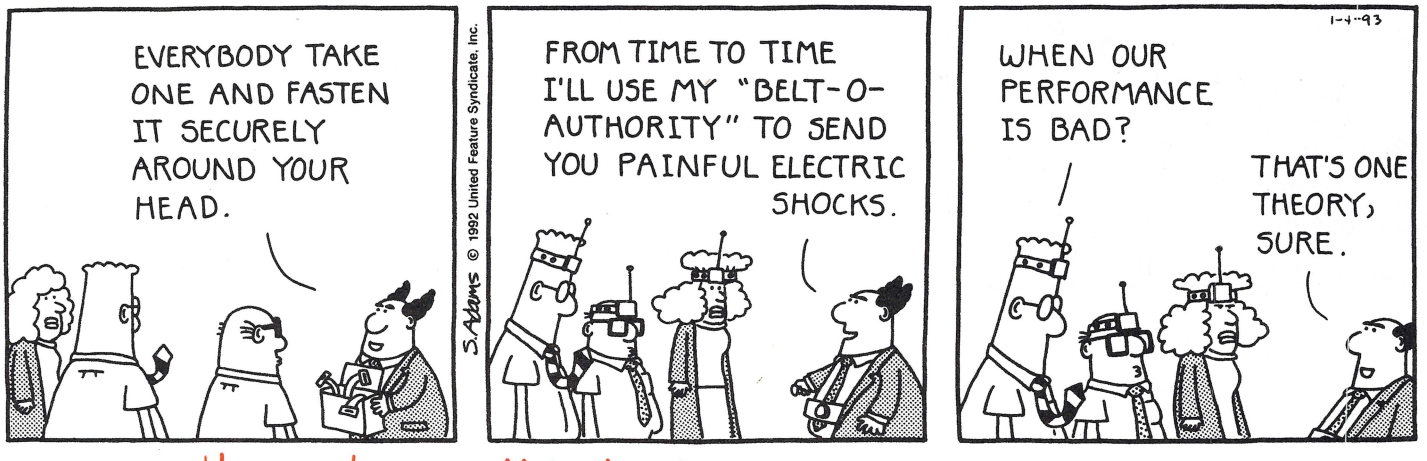
There was a time when all we talked about is how things were done in Japan. I think some of what they did was just pranks on us.

Jowls ..... No Jowls ..... Jowls

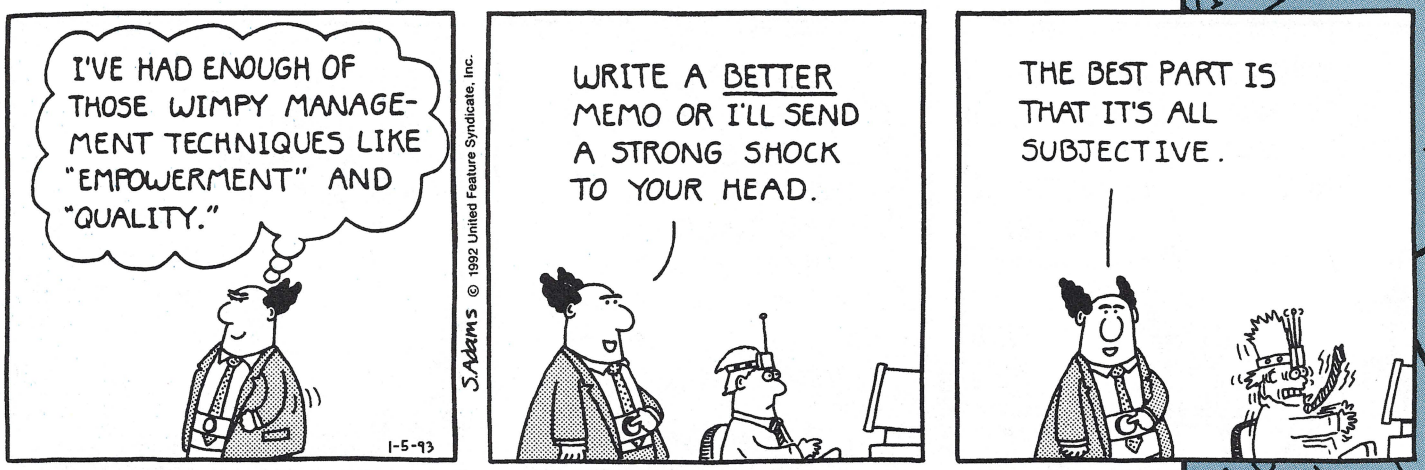

DILBERT
By Scott Adams
YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN THAT FISH...
THAT'S NOTHING, COMPARED TO THE FISH I ...
HI, DILBERT.
© 1991 United Feature Syndicate, Inc.
HE WANTS TO HUG ME. THAT'S STRANGE. OKAY, I'M A NINETIES GUY.
HI, BOSS.
NOW I'LL HAVE TO HUG THIS GUY SO IT DOESN'T SEEM AWKWARD.
HI, IT'S A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU.
6-16
I'M GLAD WE'VE OUTGROWN THE UPTIGHT EIGHTIES.
S.Adams

This became one of the most popular strips I've done.

Humor is relative.



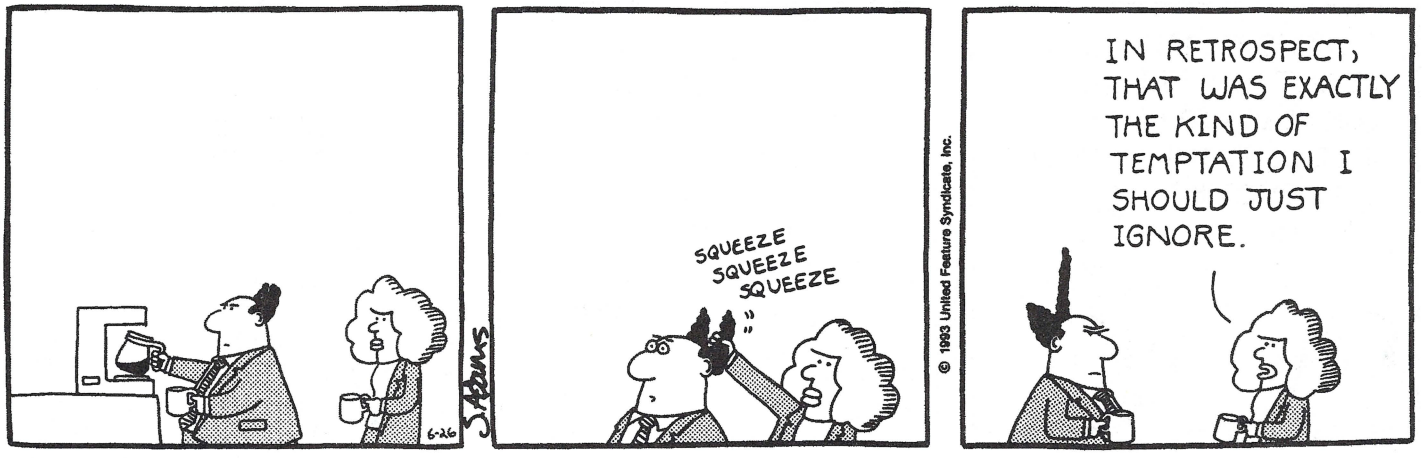
Here he's still in his "cruel" phase.



It must be frustrating to be a boss and not have the option of hurting employees.

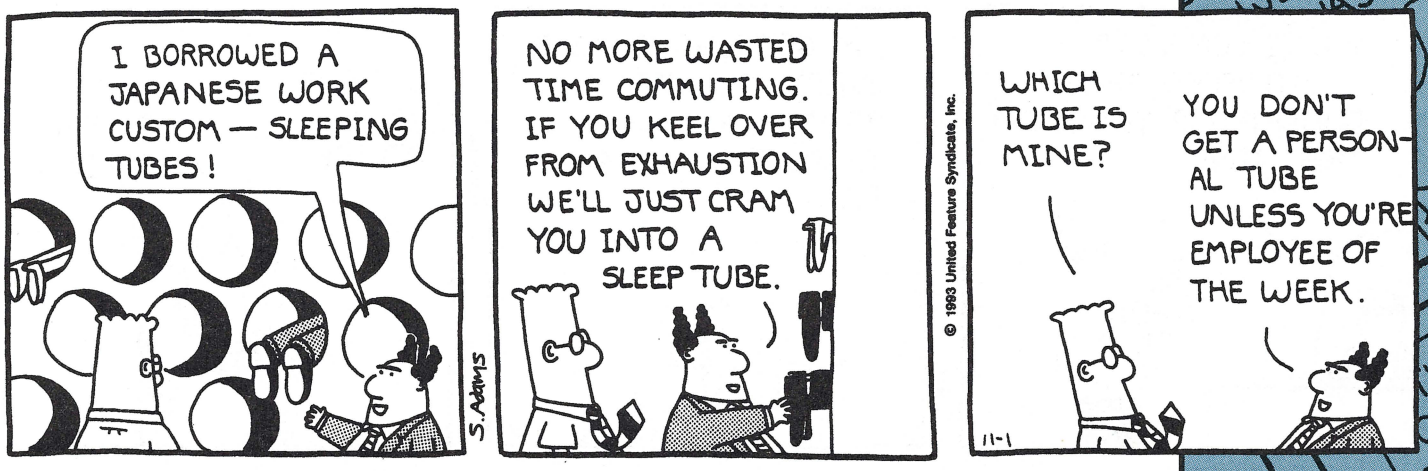
This is based closely on real life, except for the fighting.

This was another huge hit. Most employees have been in a meeting like that.

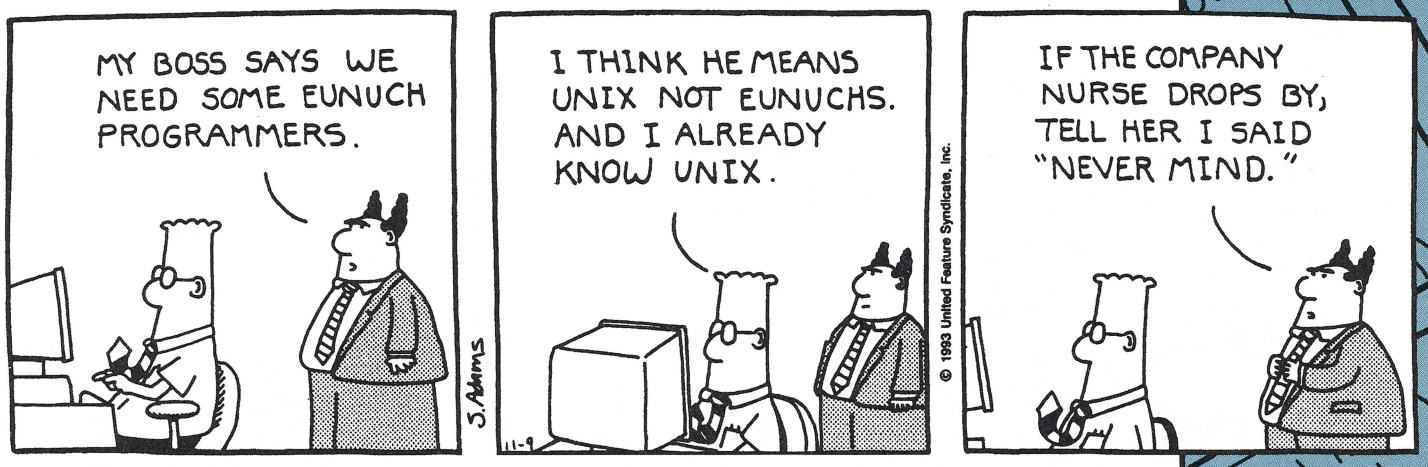


I like to have the characters do the things I would want to do in their position.

I got complaints from Temp agencies.



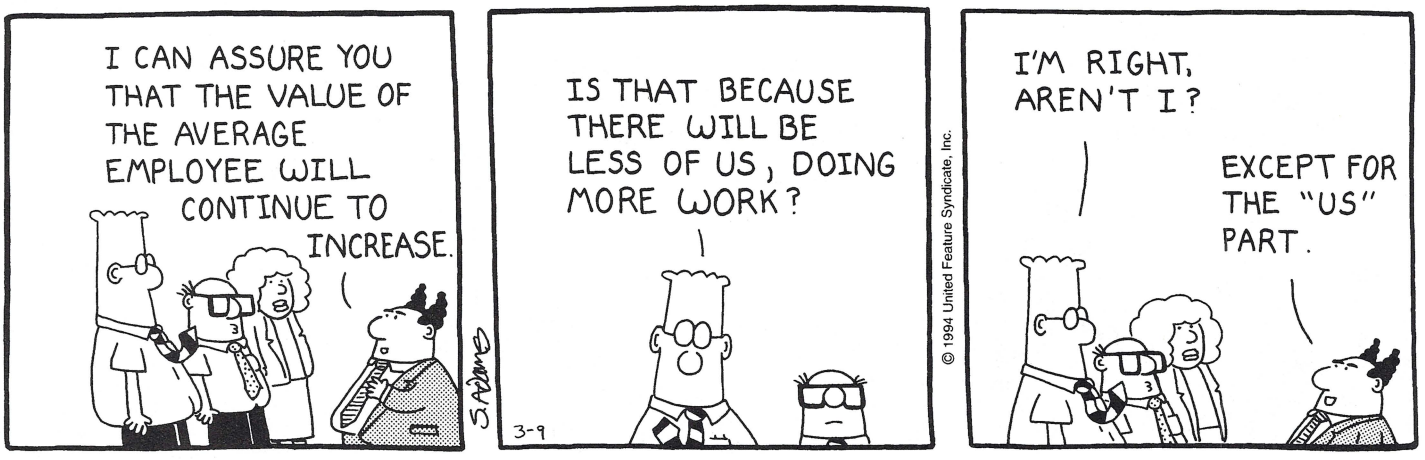
I wonder why this never caught on in the United States.

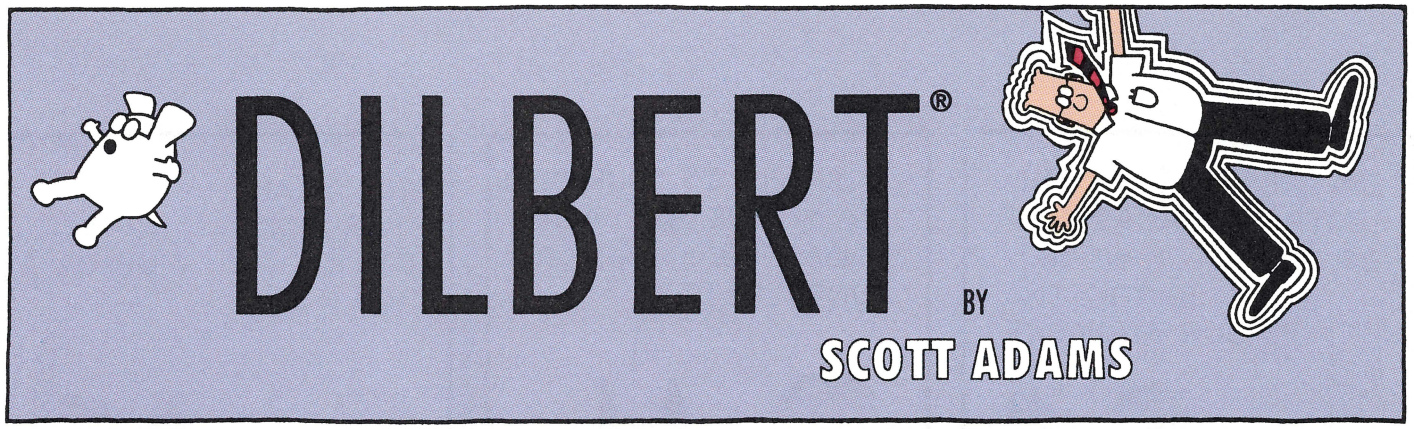


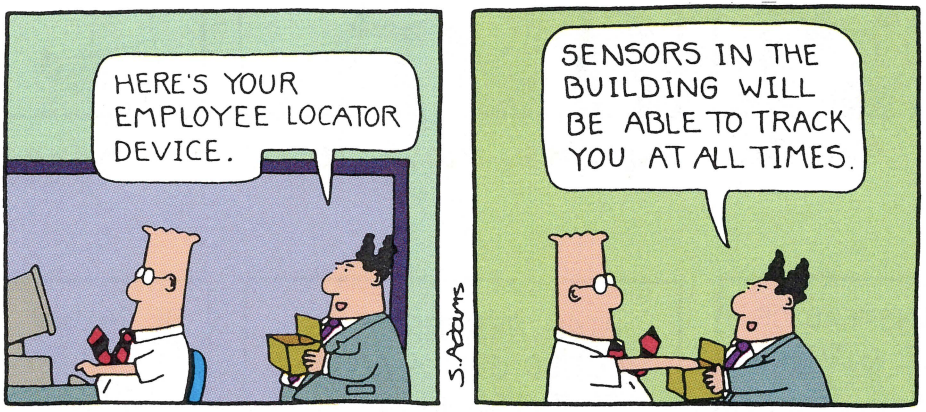
A huge frustration for technology workers is the imbecile boss.

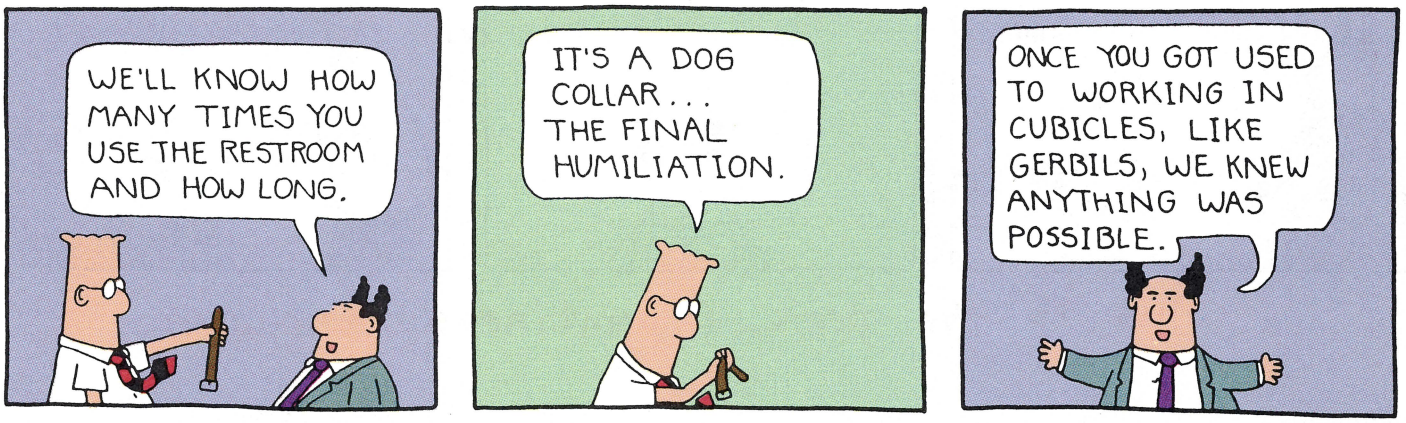
I drew this left-handed because I was having hand problems. The lettering gives it away.

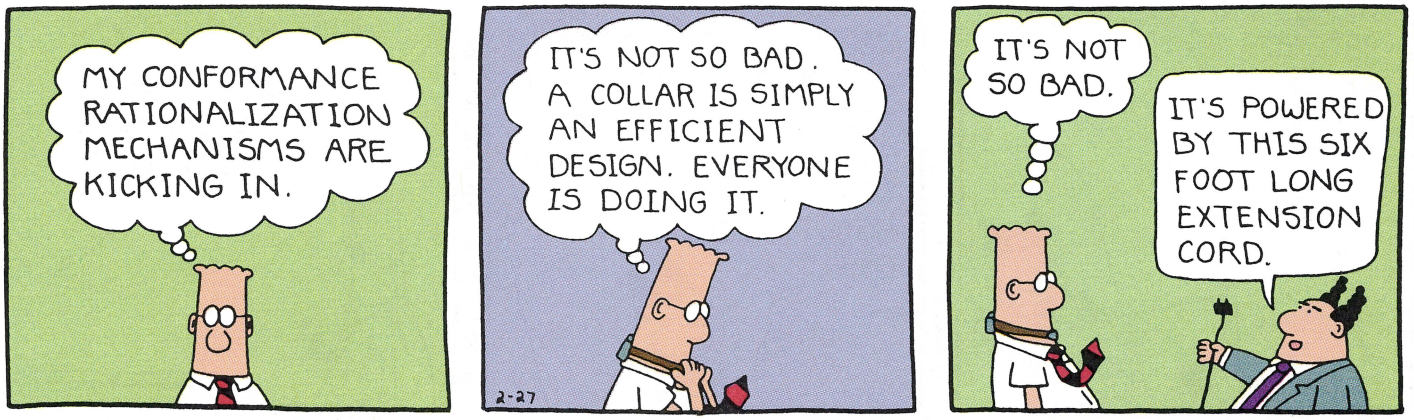
The boss's hair has become a symbol for clueless management.











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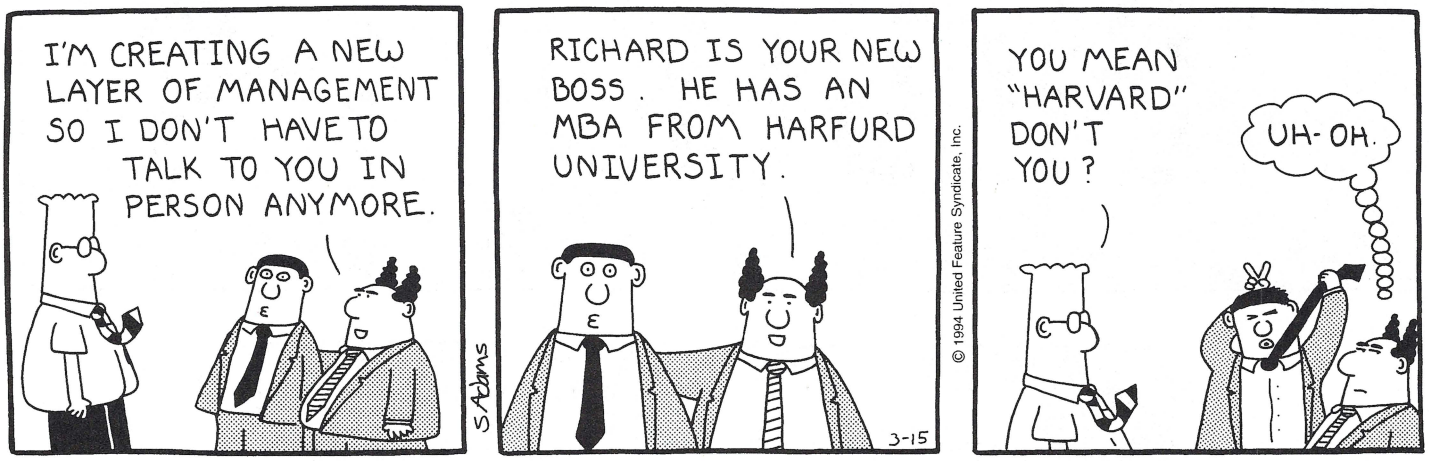
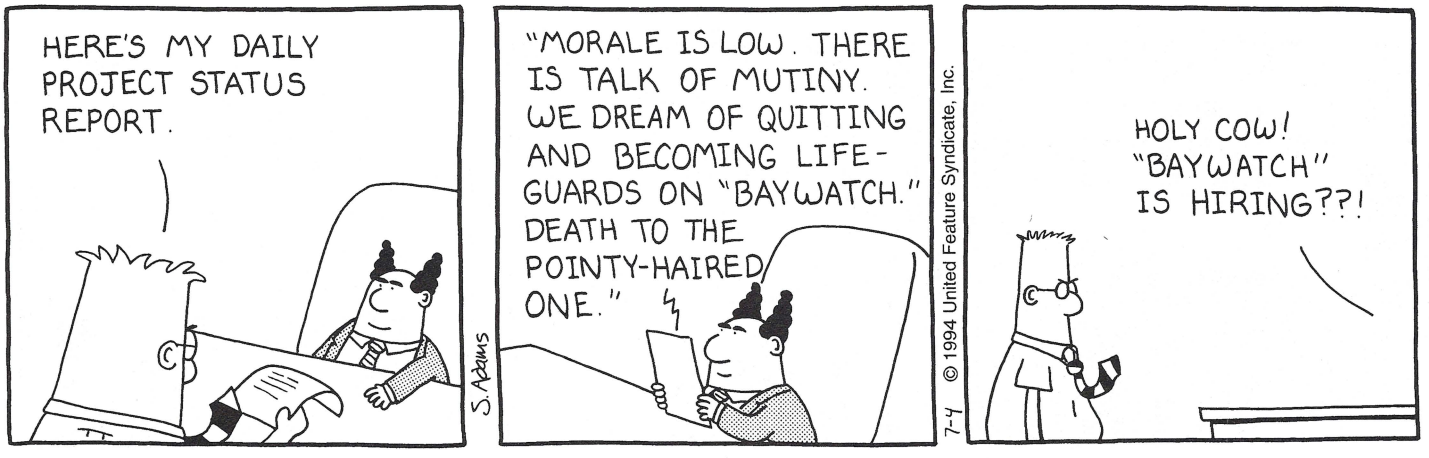
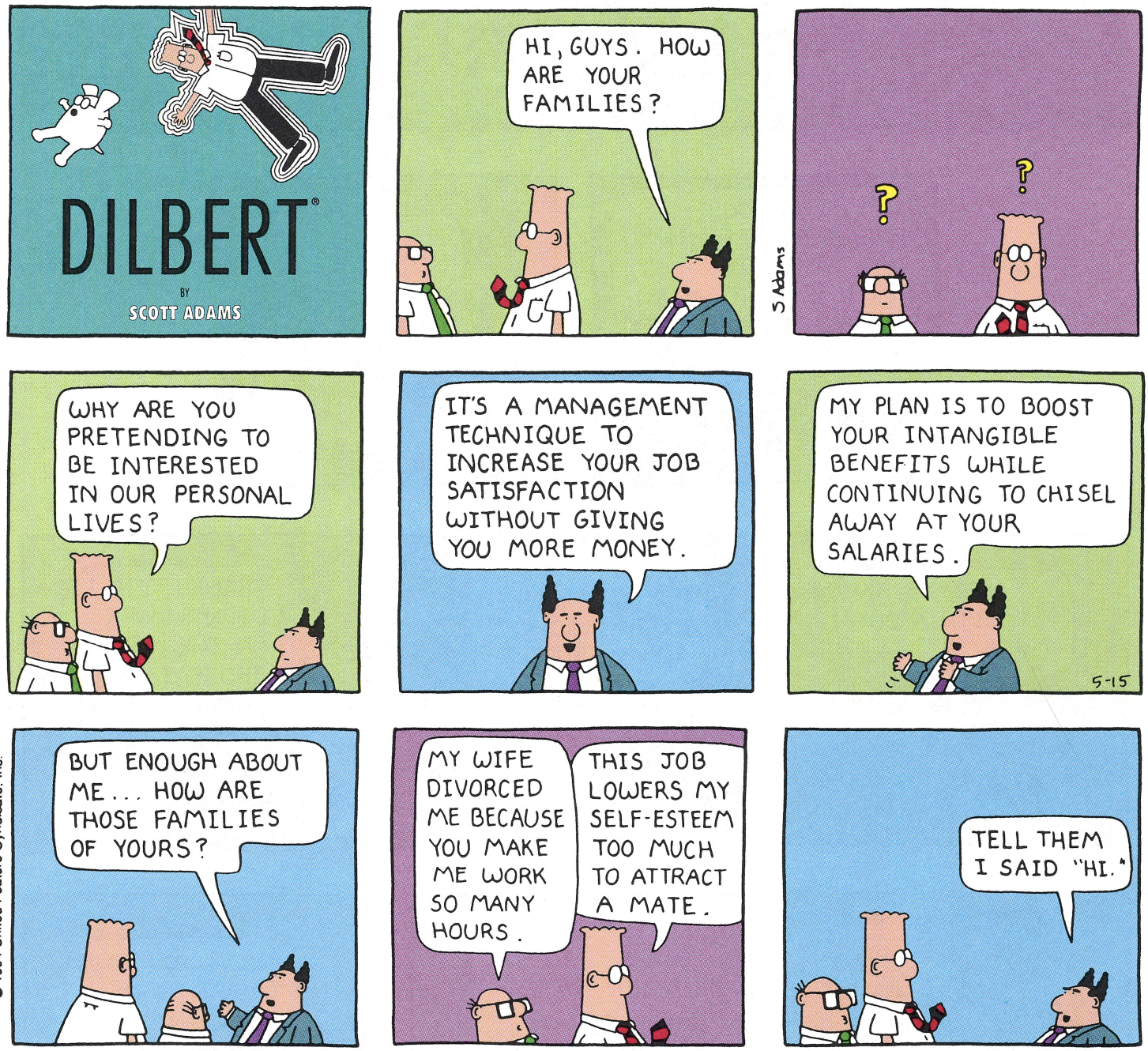
Employees can get used to anything.



This explains most levels of management.

This is the peak of pointiness, hair-wise.





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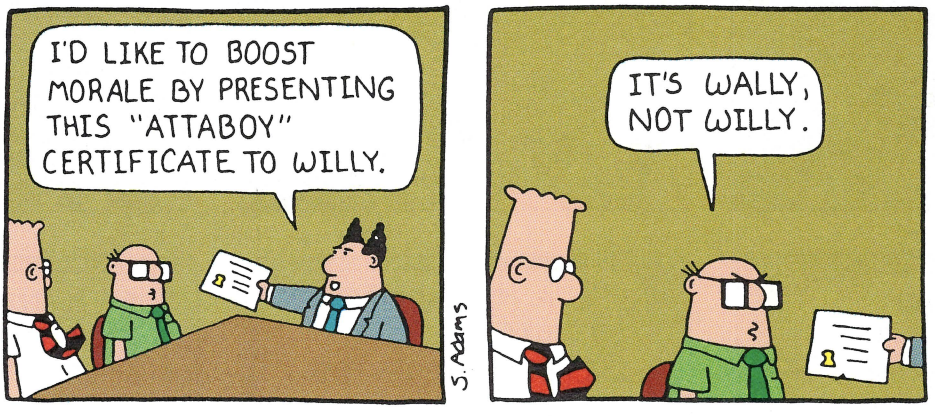
I had a boss who tried this technique on me, with similar success.

DILBERT®

BY

SCOTT ADAMS



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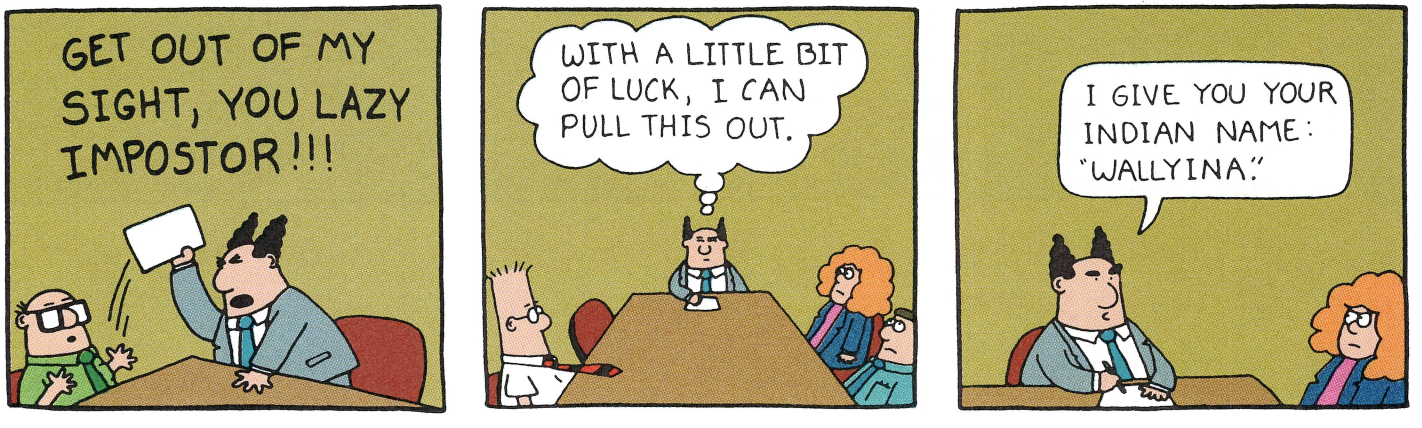
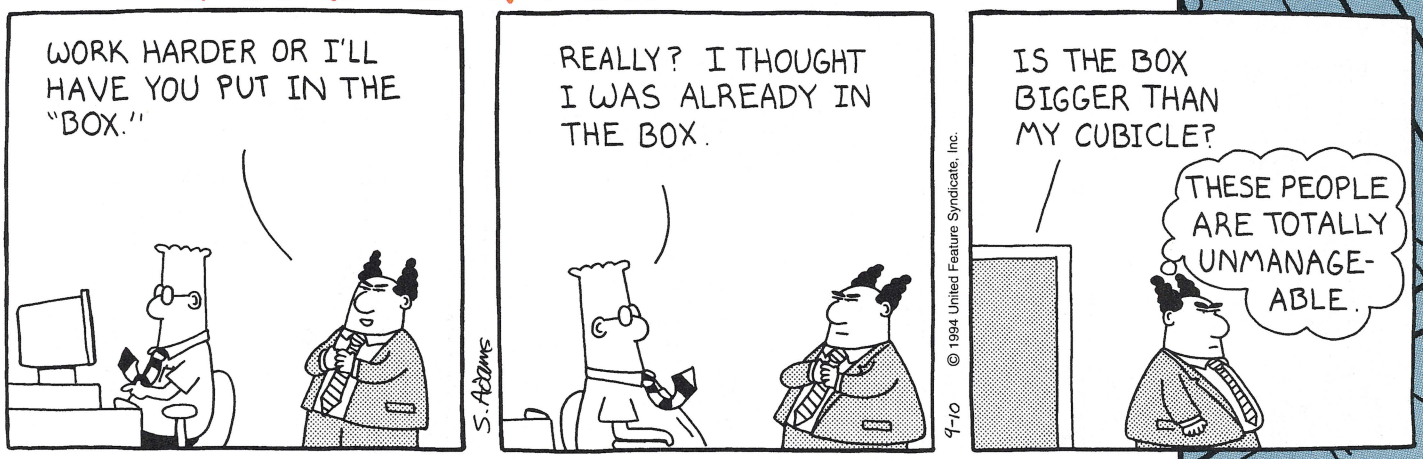


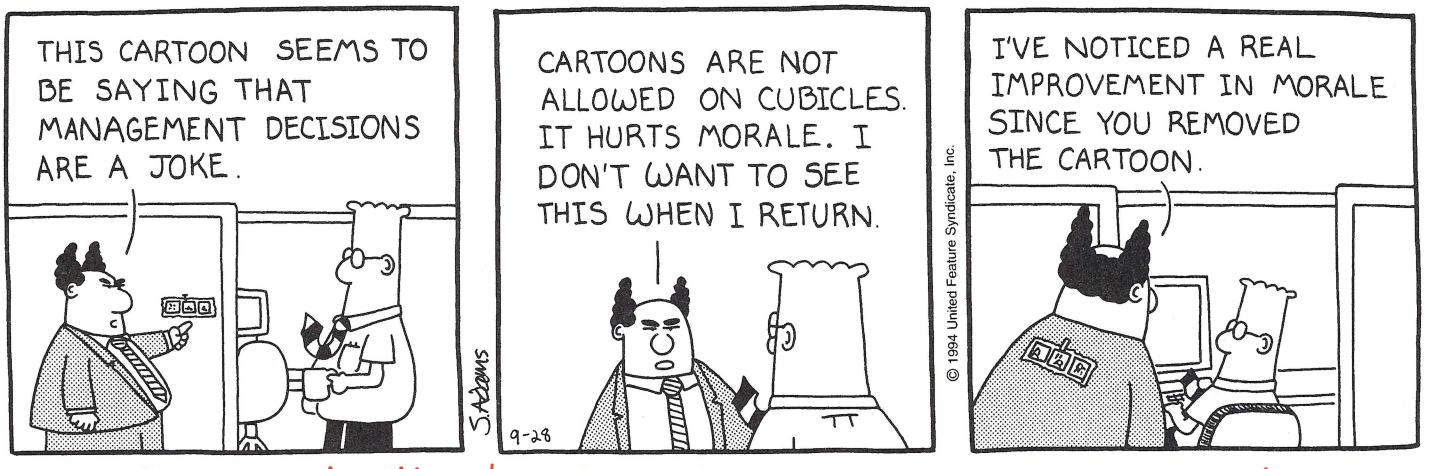
I hate this cartoon. I was tired.

Do you remember when everyone was on the same side?

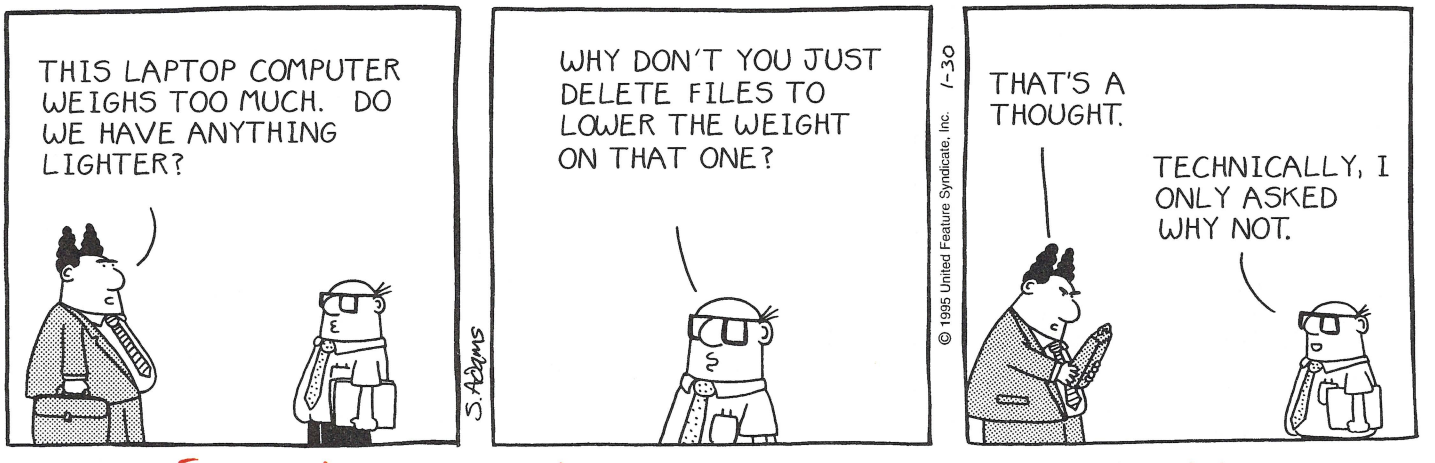
This strip was so popular that the phrase "Bungee Boss" has entered the vocabulary at some companies.



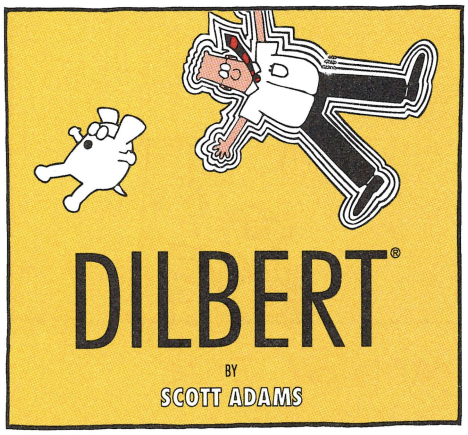
I waited in a lot of hallways at Pacific Bell.

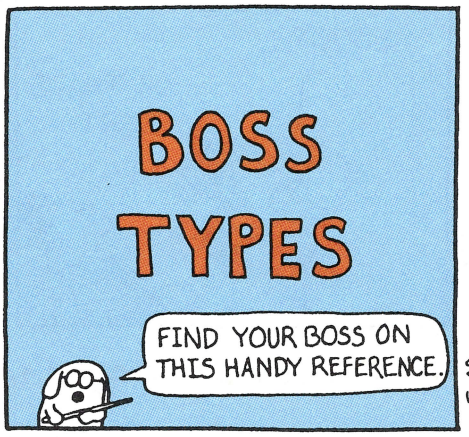


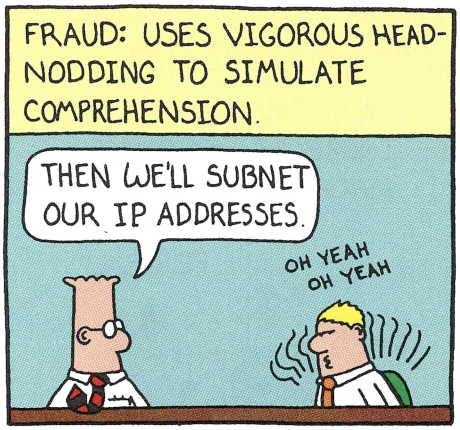
I'm constantly hearing about employees getting in trouble for putting Dilbert cartoons on their cubicles.



Somewhere, you know someone has tried this.







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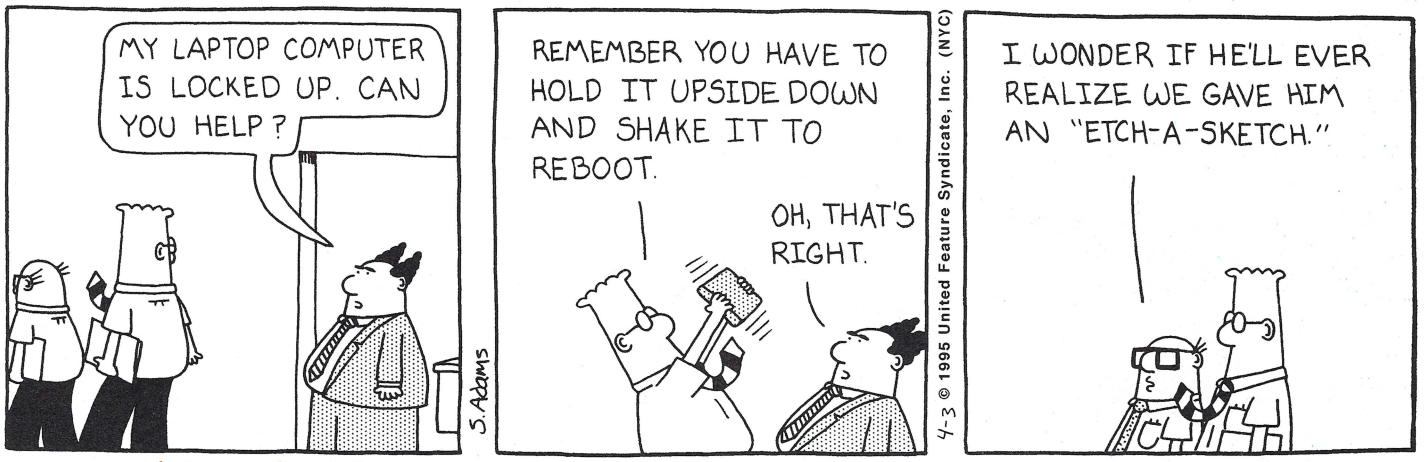
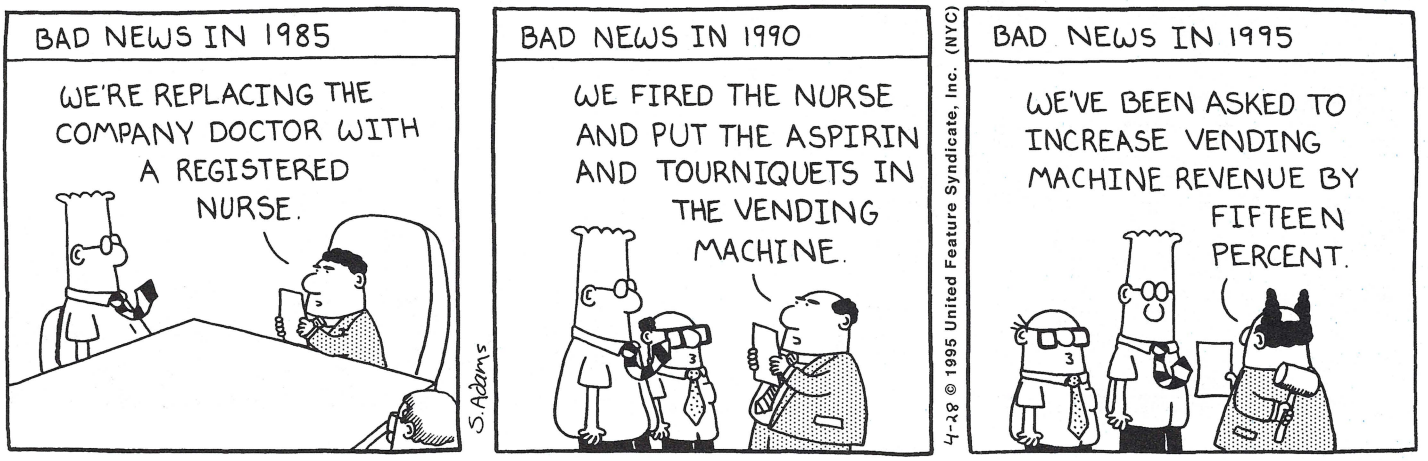
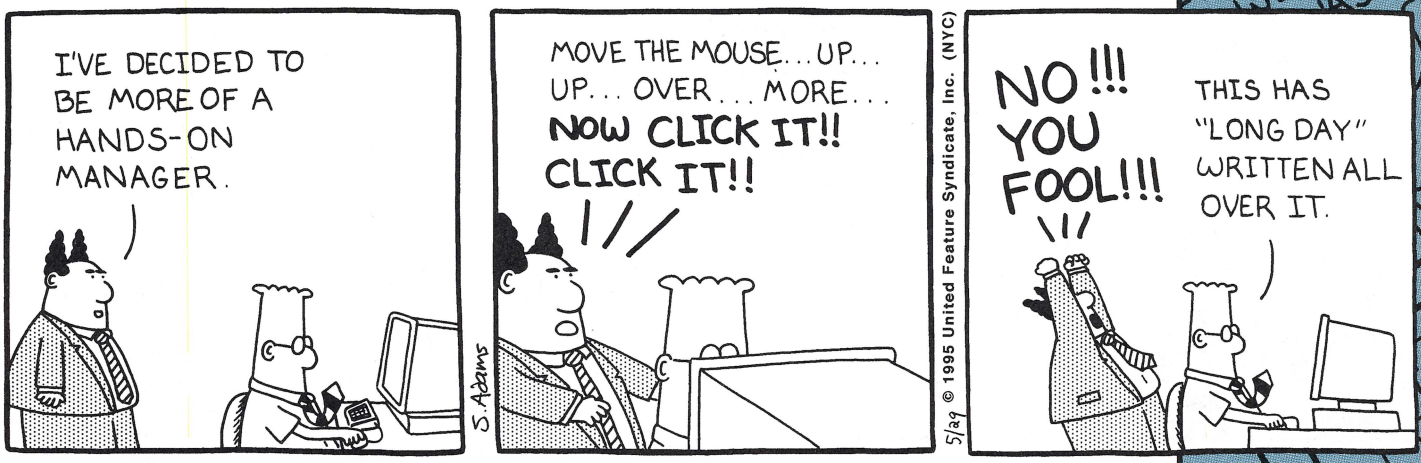
Do any of these look familiar?



This — by far — is the most popular cartoon I've ever drawn.

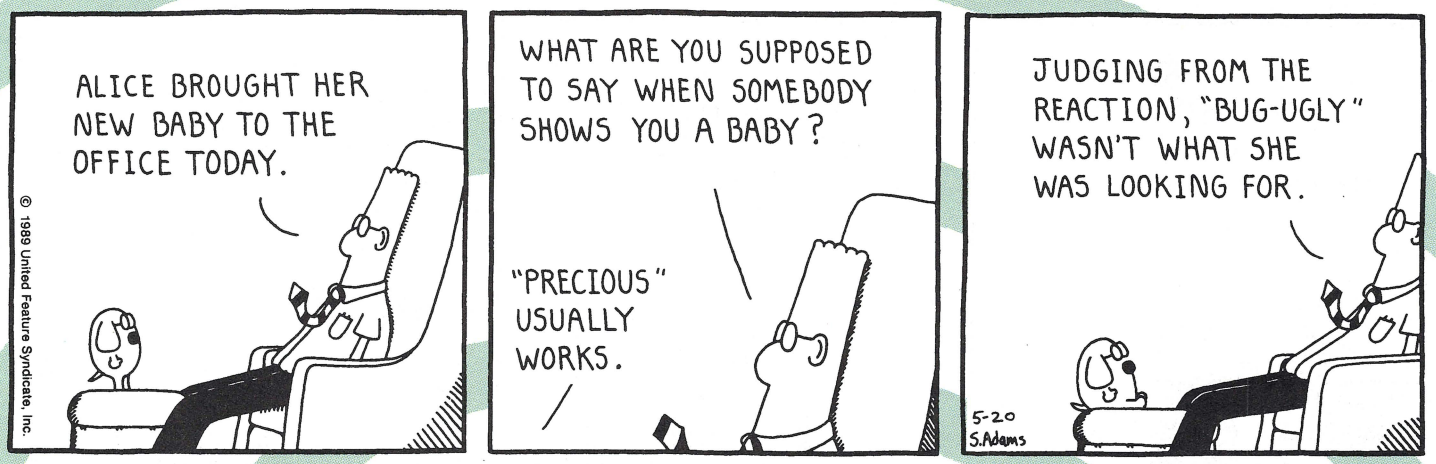


↖ That's based on reality.



A phrase you never want to hear is "hands-on manager."

So many people asked for a boss doll after this came out that we made one.



This was the first appearance of Alice. she didn't have the distinct attitude she has now.

The "xerox" machine is a good place to reproduce.

I had a long discussion with my editor about this one.

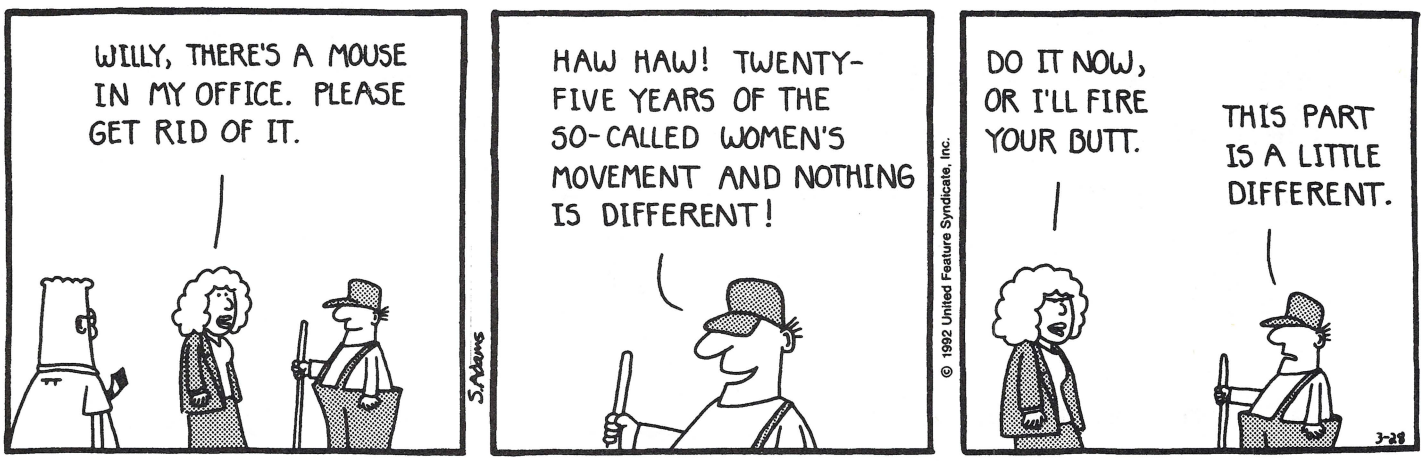
ALICE

Alice wasn't always Alice. In the beginning there were a variety of fluffy-haired female characters in Dilbert's office but they didn't have many lines. Over time the personality of my friend and co-worker at Pacific Bell started to channel into the strip, emerging as the recurring character Alice. Alice's real-world counterpart (actual name Anita) was the model for Alice's pink suit, her fluffy hair, her long work hours, her coffee obsession, her technical proficiency, and her take-no-crap attitude.

As far as I know, the human version of Alice has never kicked a man into his hat, stuffed an intern into his shirt sleeve, or slapped a man so hard he traveled back in time. But if I ever hear about it happening, it won't surprise me.

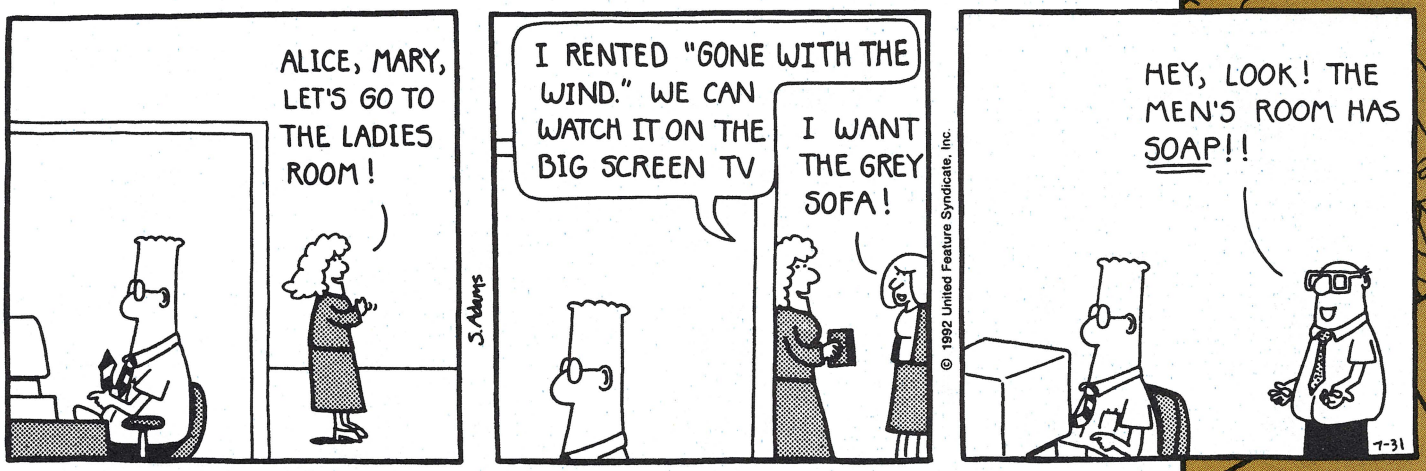
Alice's hair has become bigger and more triangular for no real reason except that I like it that way. It's a challenge to keep it in the frame sometimes but it's worth it.

This is a suggestion of the Alice to come.

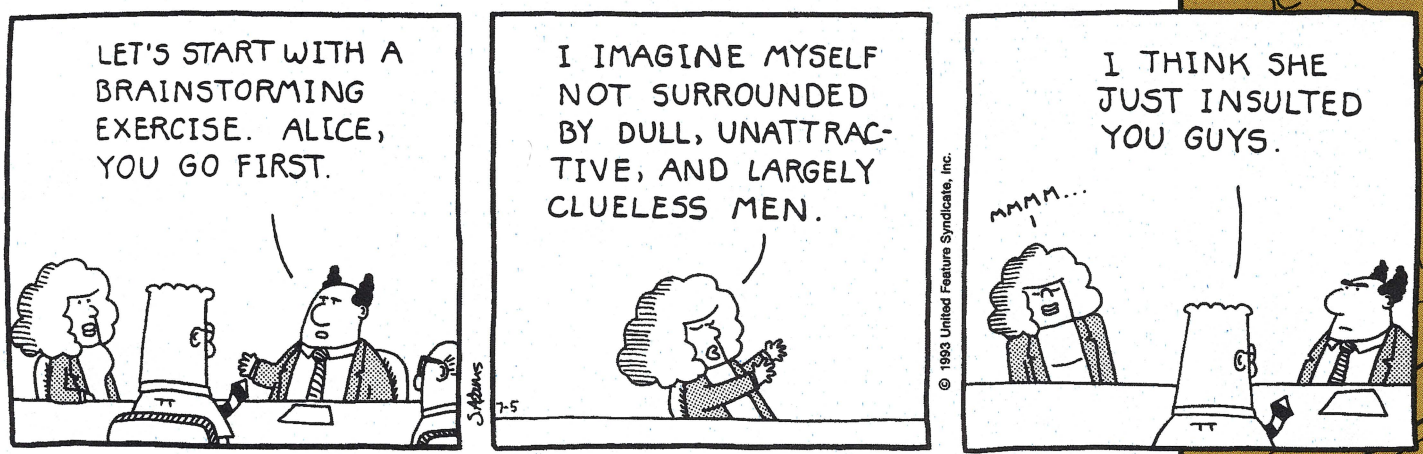


I stuck Dilbert here so you'd know what comic you were reading.

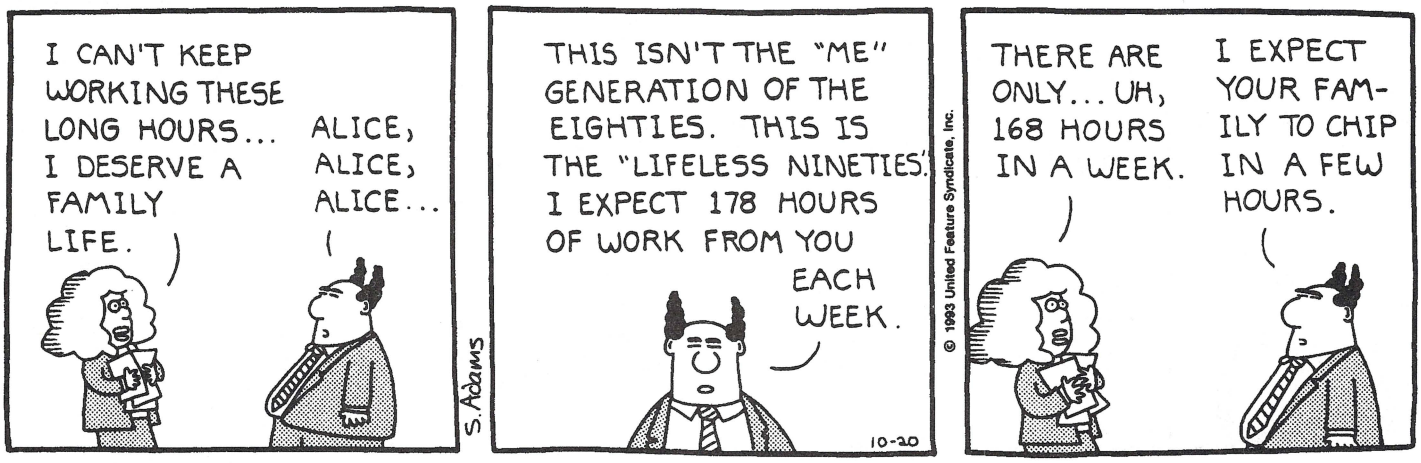
This was a generic Alice-like character.



This is a cheap laugh, but I'm not proud.



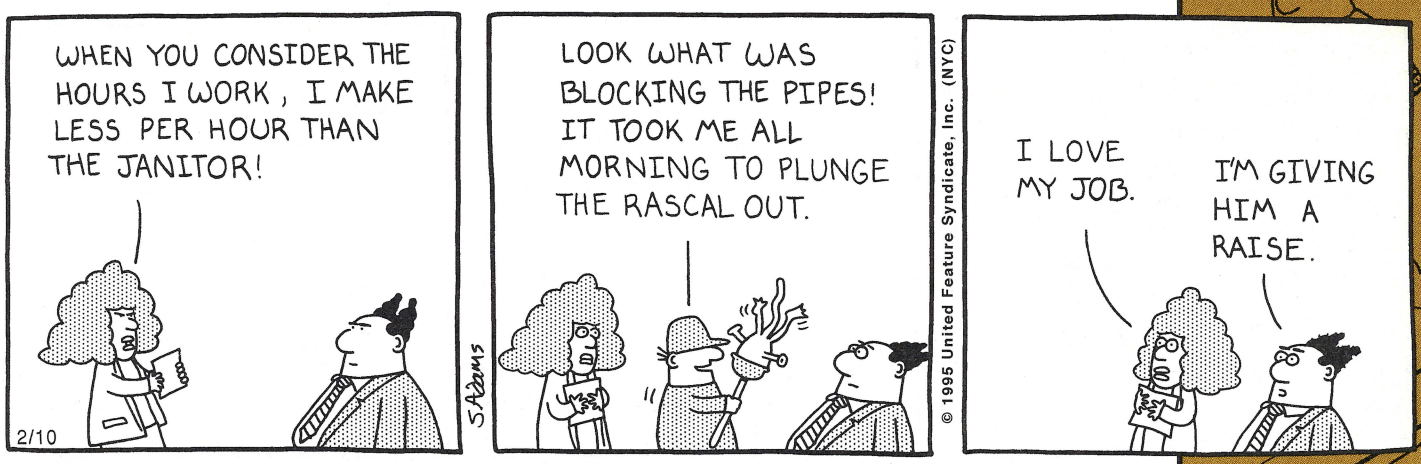
It's tough to be the only woman in engineering.



Alice's personality is becoming fully formed at this point.

She's overworked, so she has a reason to be cranky.

The hair has taken a vaguely pyramid shape.



↑ I don't know what that is.

I've noticed that women care about their performance reviews far more than men do. (Yeah, I know it's an unfair generalization.)

This explains it.

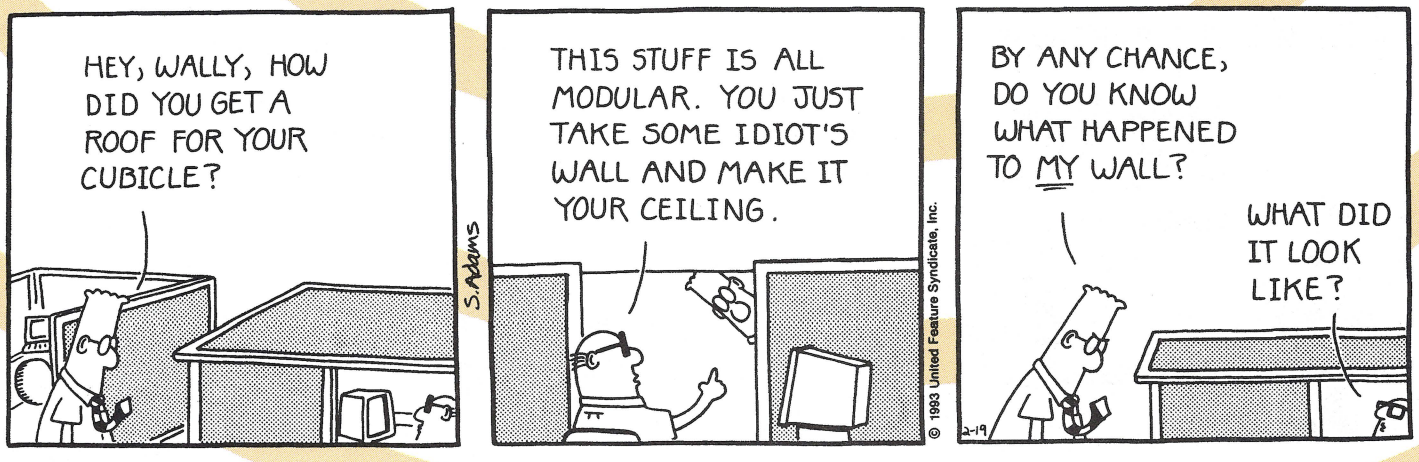
No matter how good a performance review is, it's never good enough.

This tradition will live forever.

This is just a mouse, not Ratbert.

Wally is always trying to work the system.

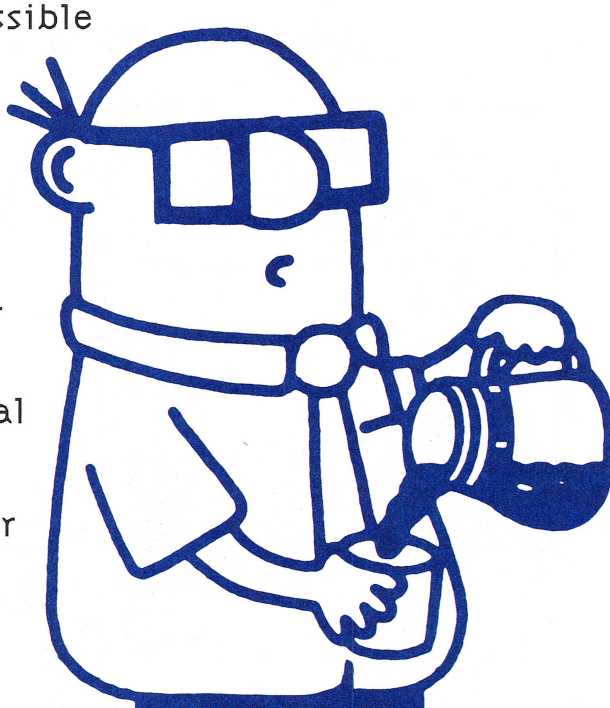
This was inspired by a Woody Allen movie where Woody played a court jester. I liked the look.

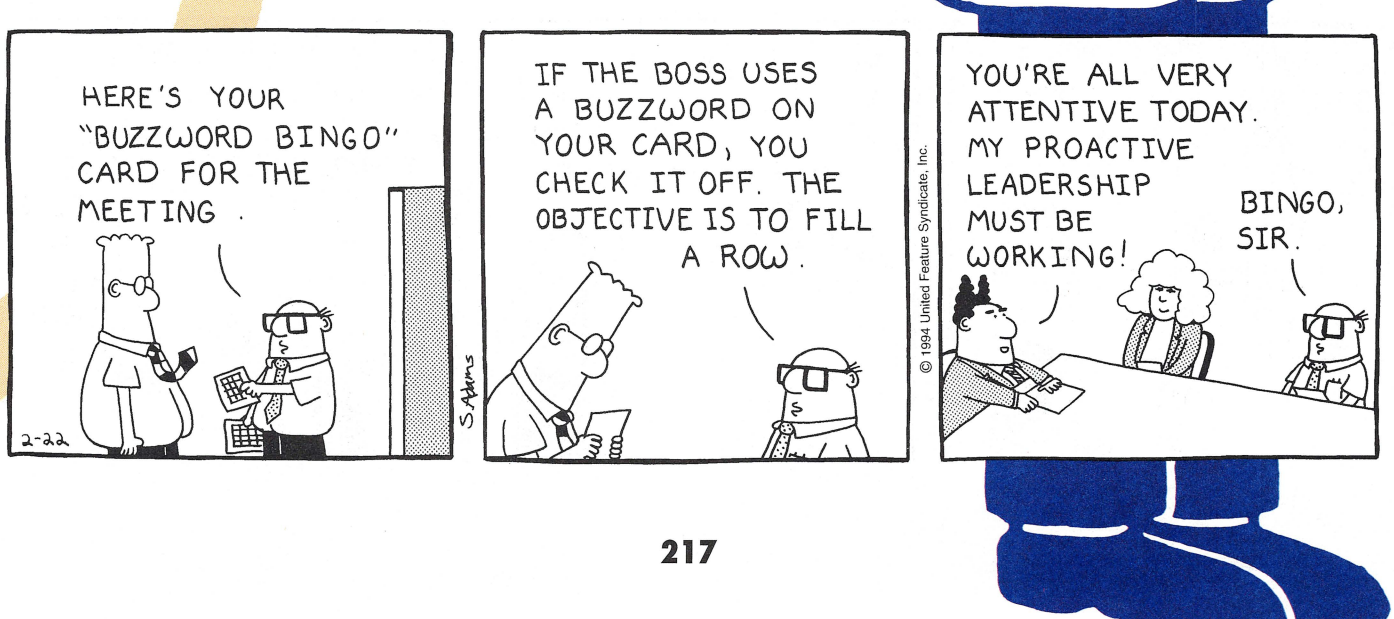


WALLY

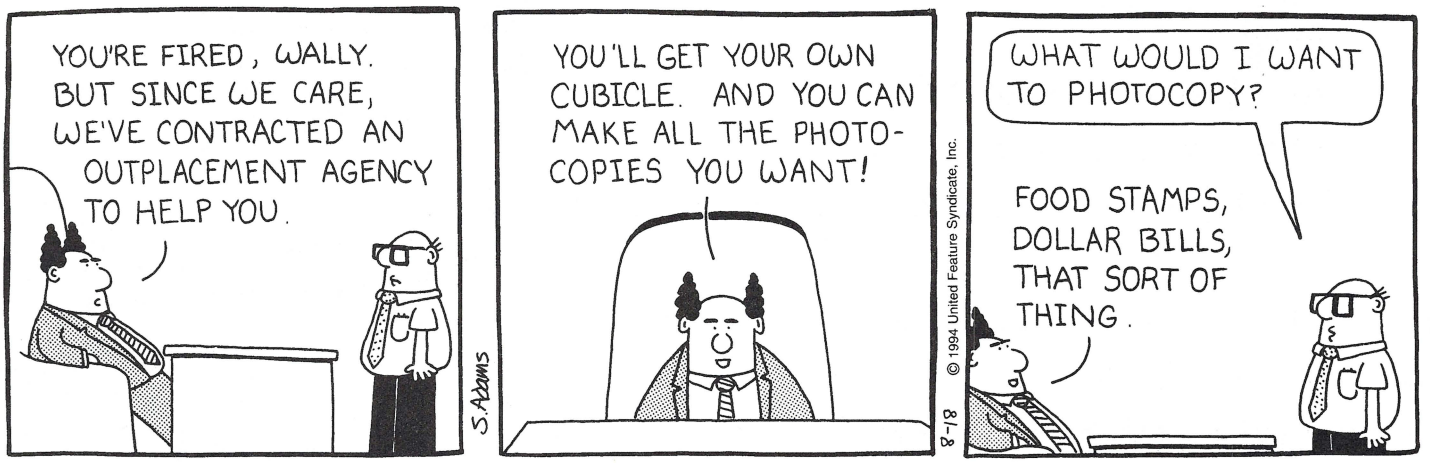
There were a number of pre-**Wally** characters who had similar looks and bit parts in Dilbert's office. The true Wally didn't emerge until one of my co-workers at Pacific Bell found himself in an unusual situation: He wanted to leave the company, but not without getting one of the generous buyout packages that were being offered as part of the larger downsizing efforts. Unfortunately, the buyouts were limited to people who were identified as being in the lowest ten percent of the performers. That created a bizarre incentive for my co-worker to try as hard as he could to become the worst possible employee in order to get money for leaving. This wouldn't have been so fun to watch except that this fellow was one of the more brilliant people I've met and he was totally dedicated to this goal.

I loved the concept of a thoroughly cynical employee who has no sense of company loyalty and feels no need to mask his poor performance or his total lack of respect. Wally was born.

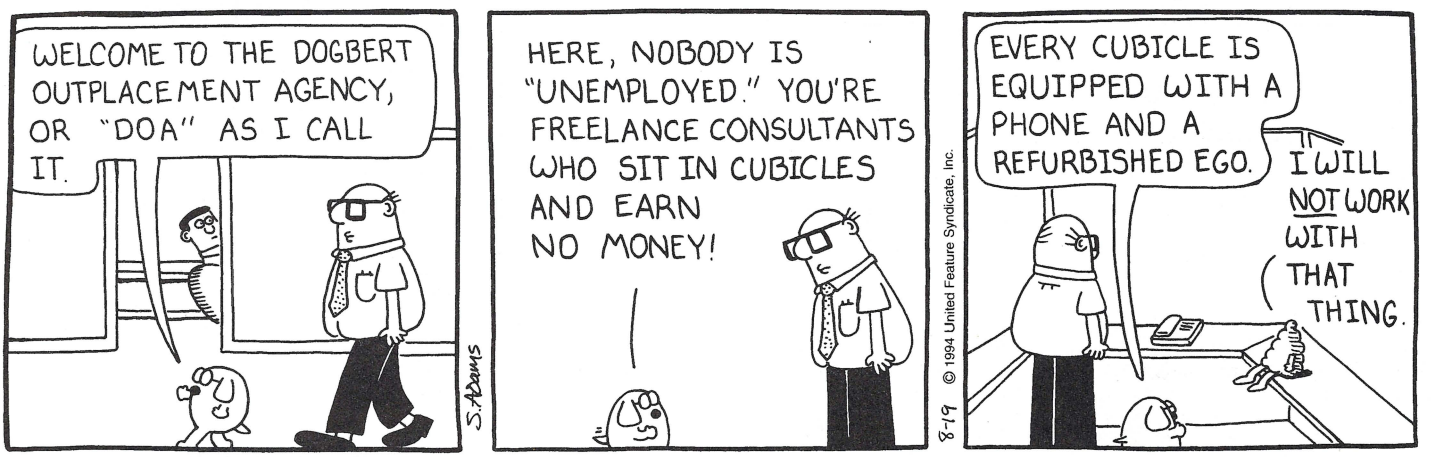


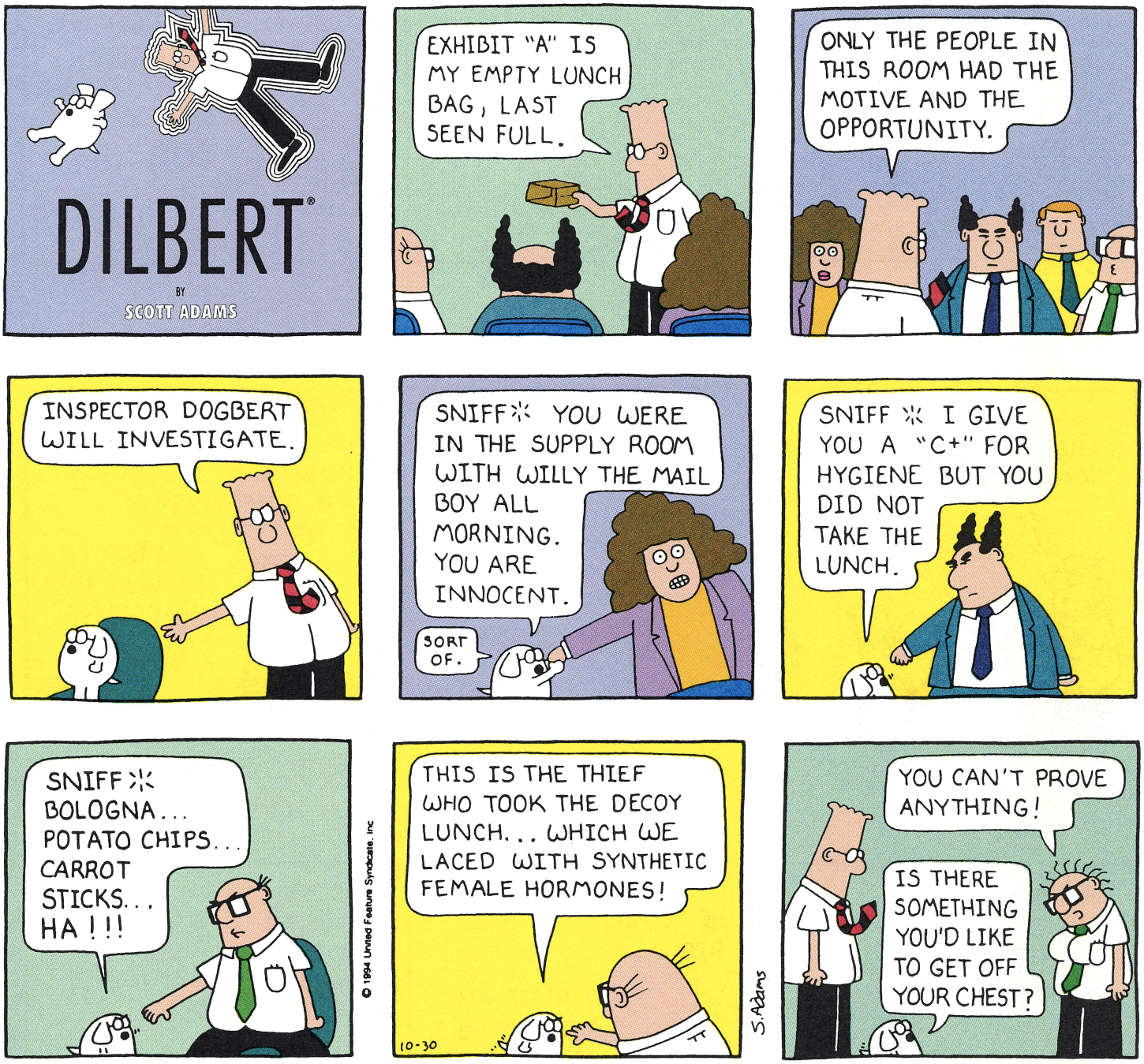


You can never be sure when Wally is being sarcastic.



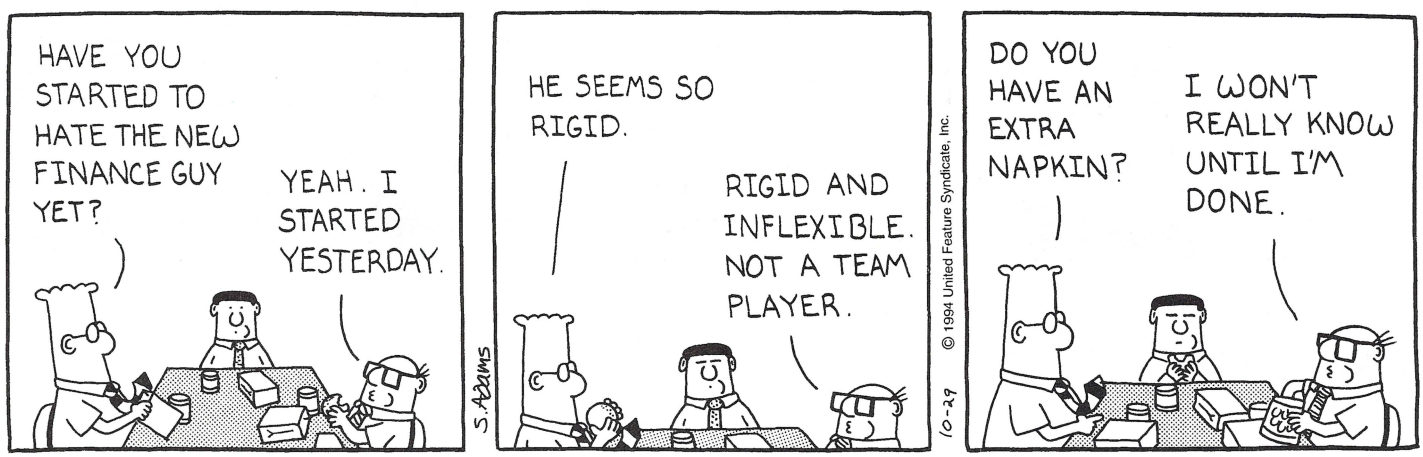
Bad things happen to Wally. He takes it in stride.



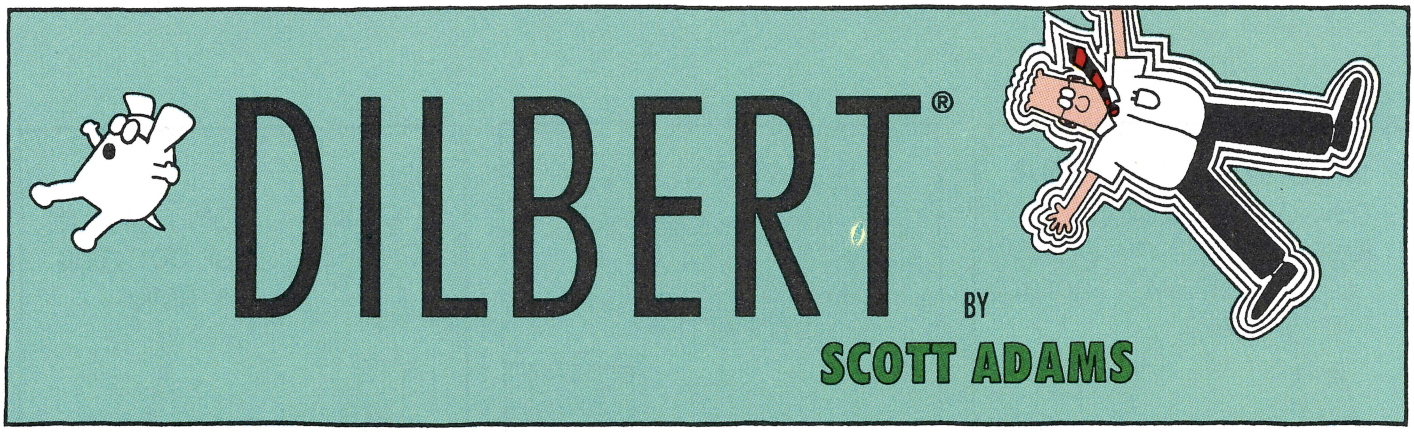


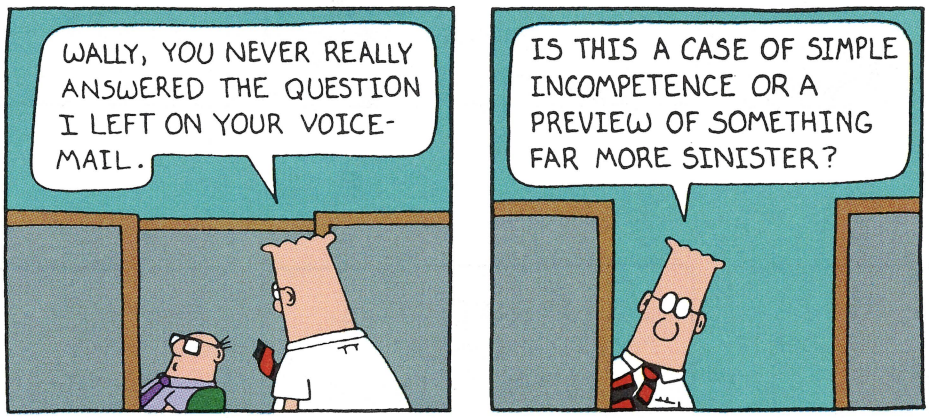
Some women complained because they said I'm implying that being female is a punishment.

That's actually Wally, but it's not obvious.

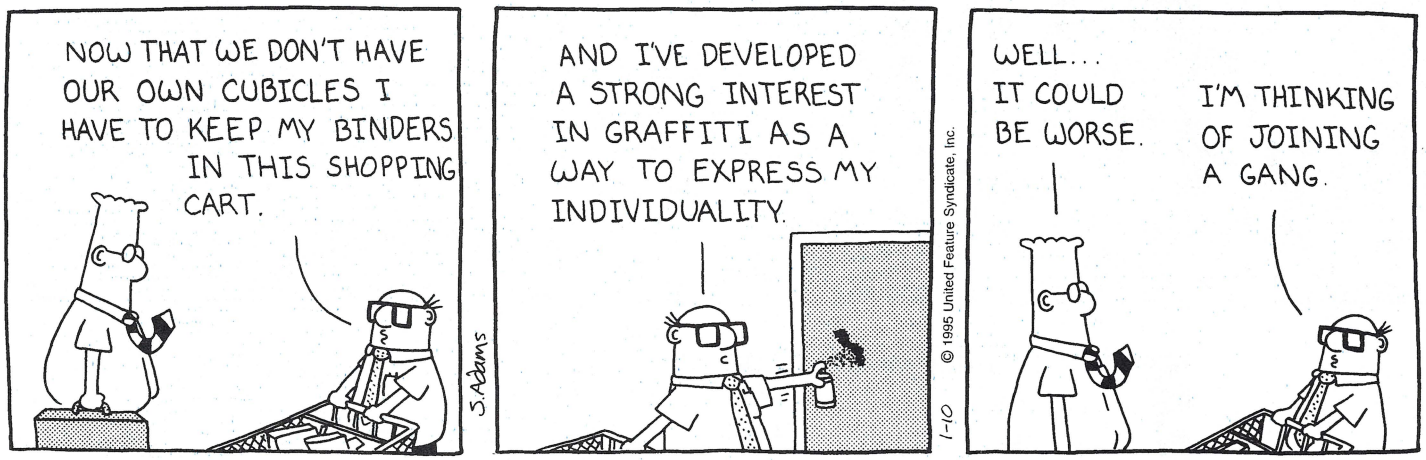


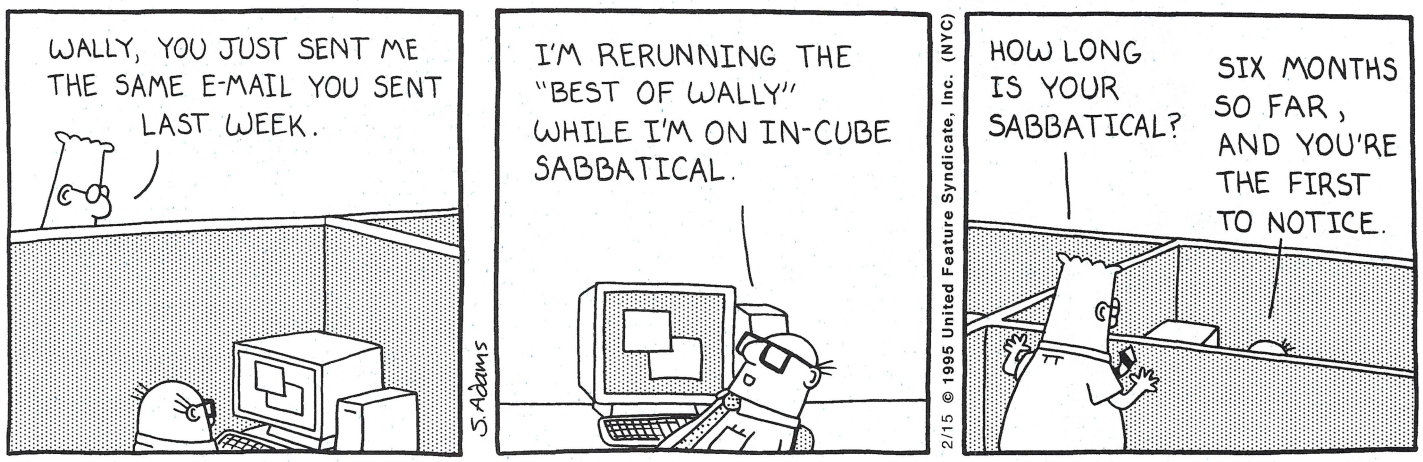
I've noticed that other people can be inflexible.





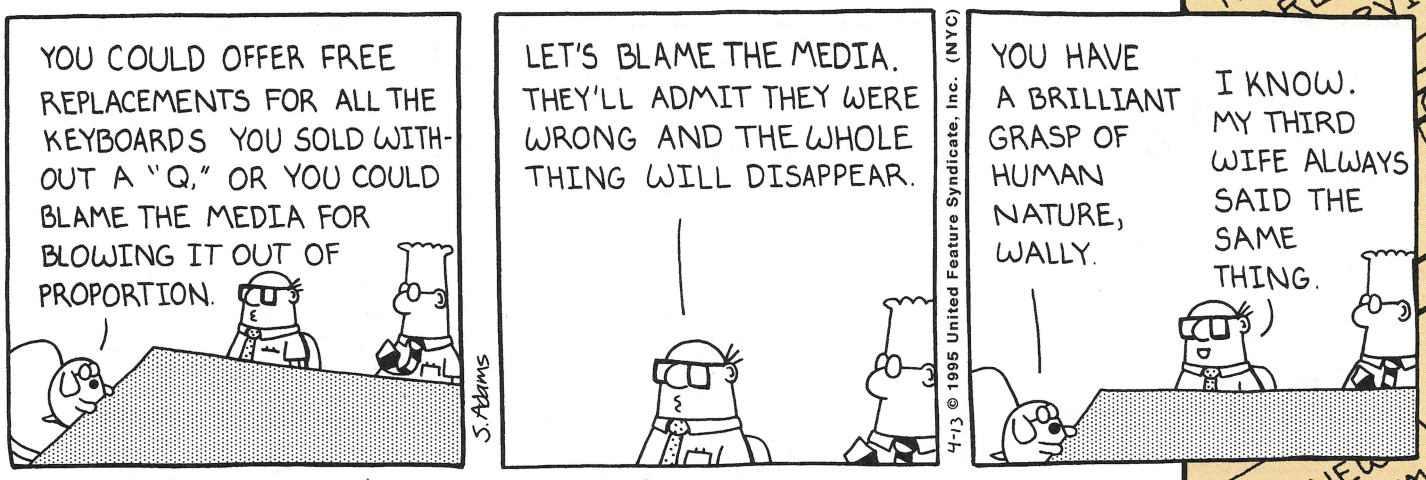
There's always someone like this in every group.



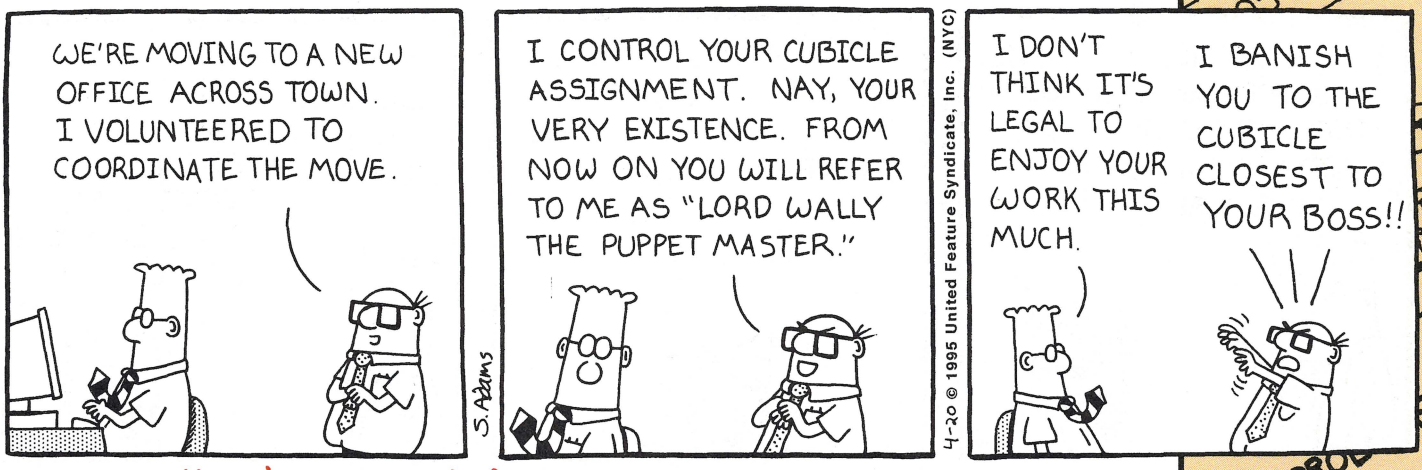


I spent 17 years in corporate jobs and never did anything that made an impact. I don't think I was alone.

Wally is easy to draw, so he gets a lot of face time.



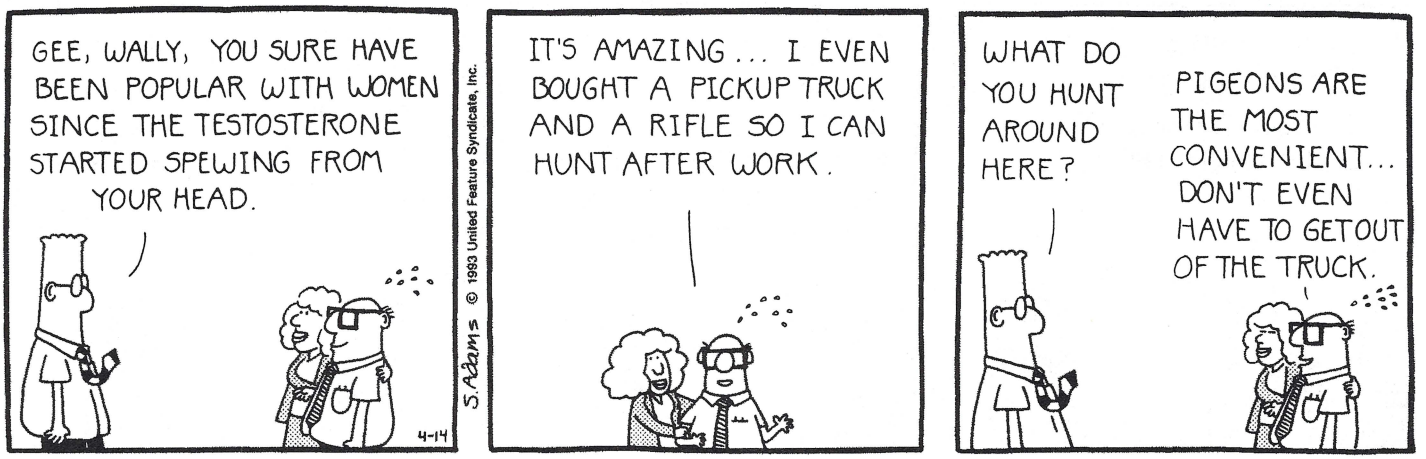
Wally has been married but now he's single.



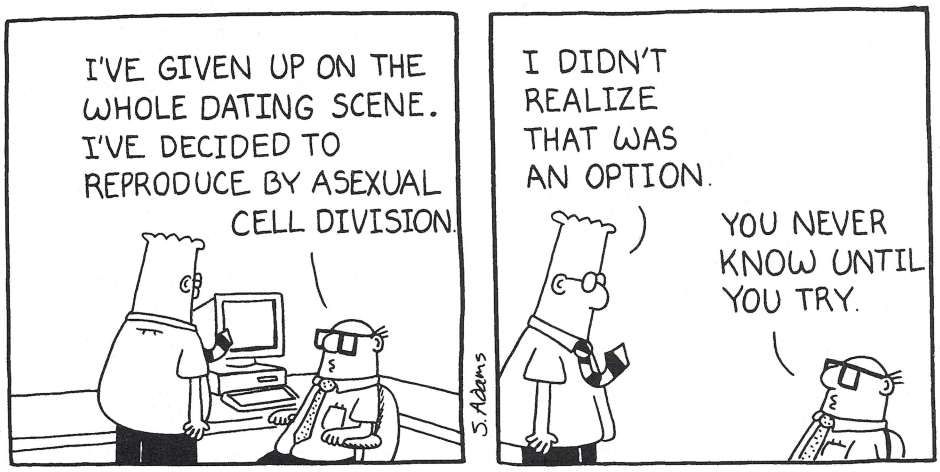
Wally is the kind of guy who shouldn't have power.

. . . and Hygiene Issues

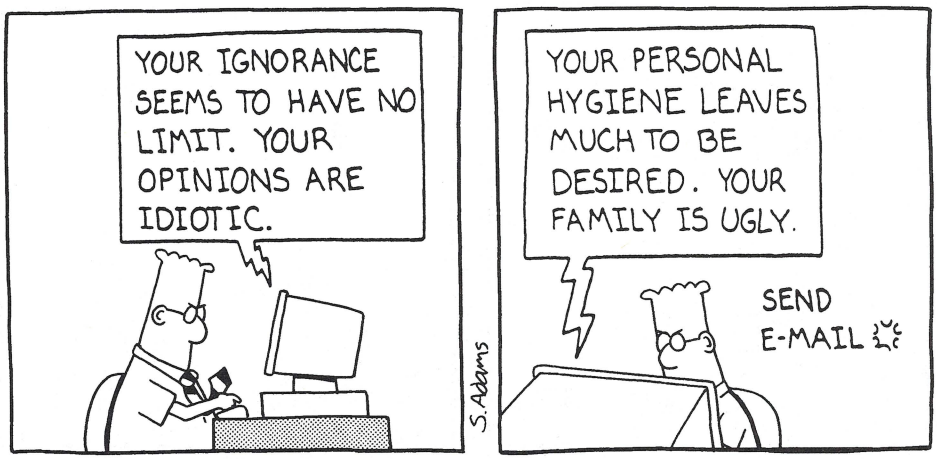
I'm glad that baldness is becoming somewhat fashionable.



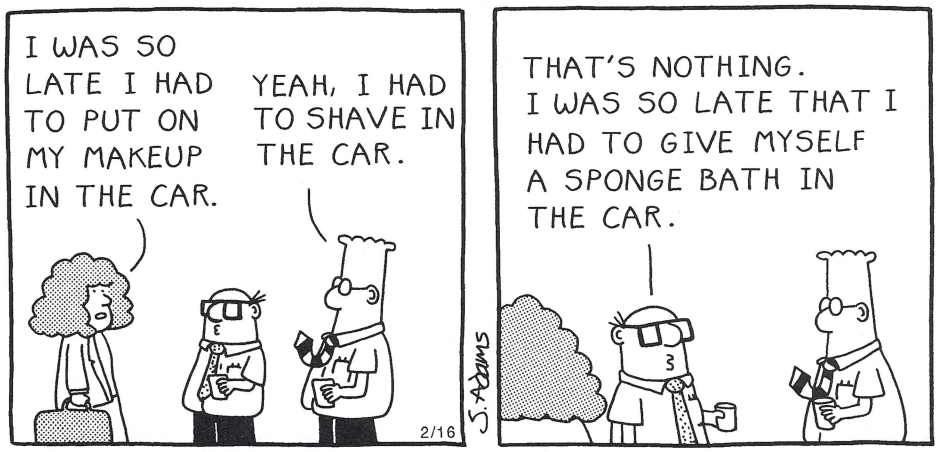
You see, miners use canaries to sense gas...



↖ My motto.



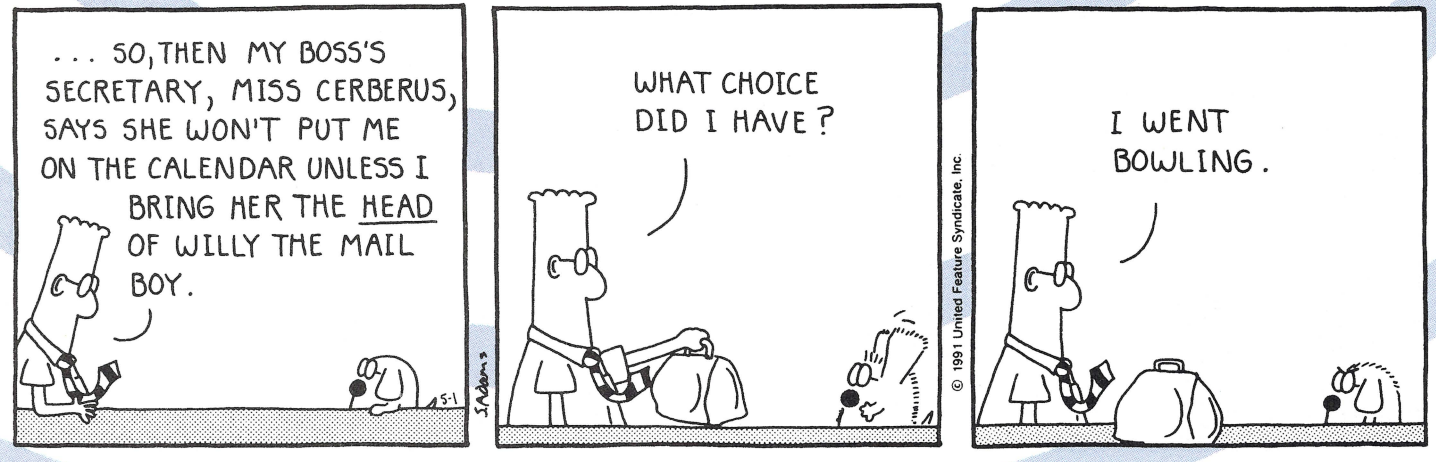
On the Internet, everyone is a bully.



"sponge bath" is a good comedy phrase.

I've had big problems with secretaries.

↑ This became a Dilbert book title.

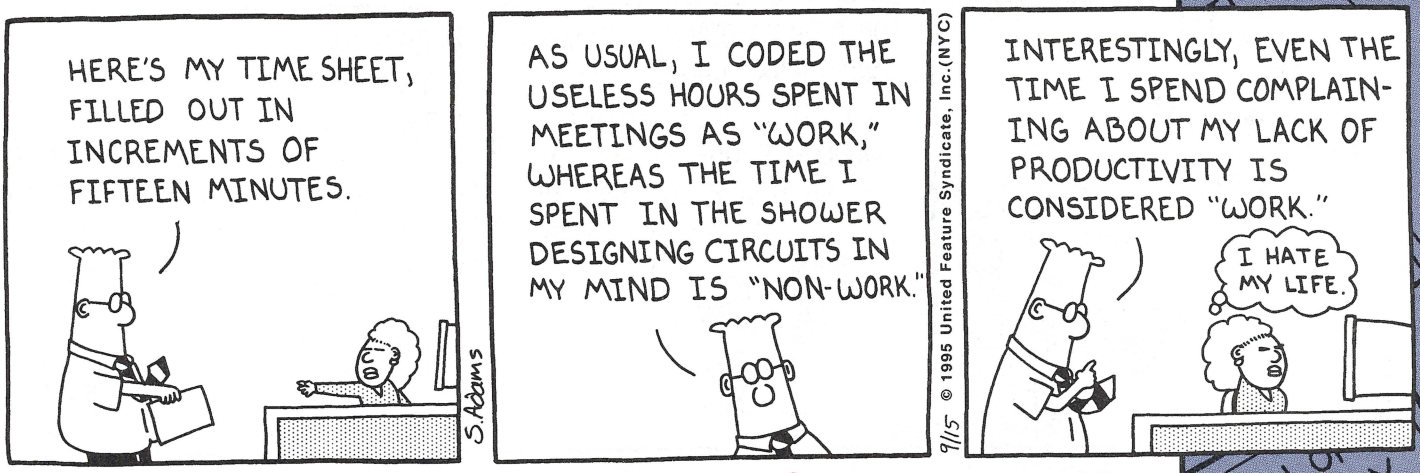


CAROL

Carol Sometimes you'll find a secretary who likes and respects the boss and is helpful to everyone else in the office. But more often you get the "secretary from hell" who hates her job and finds perverse joy in making everyone within a two-mile radius suffer. Carol is one of the secretaries who tries to get as much of this sadistic joy as possible. She's a composite of all the bad experiences I've ever had with any secretary, and there have been many.

The "secretary with a crossbow" came from an e-mail message from a secretary who said she sometimes wished she had one.

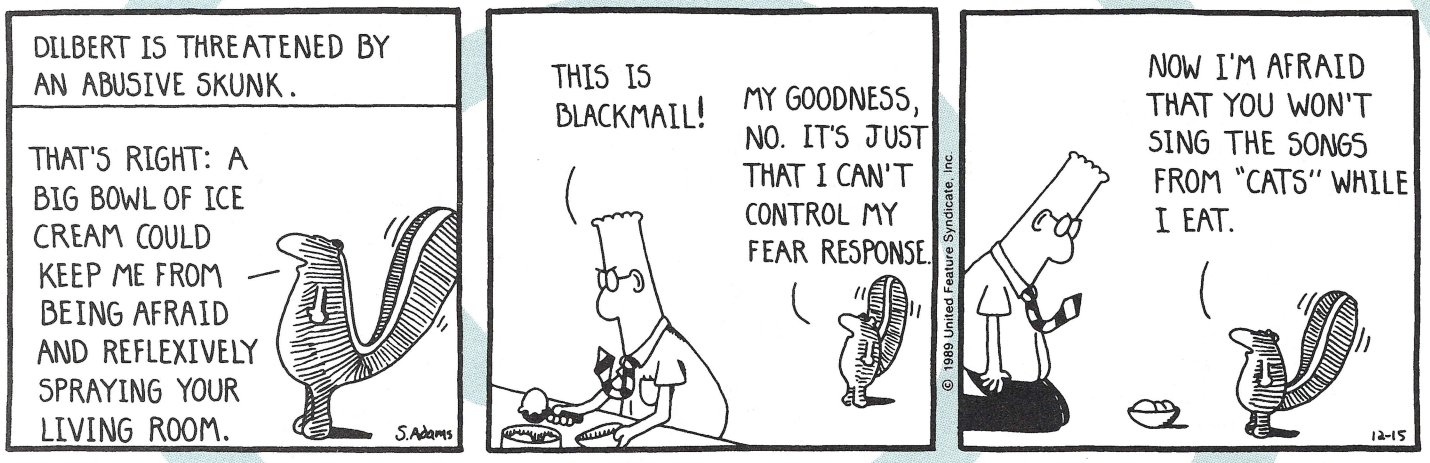
I hear lots of stories of initials that spell words.



what exactly is "work" for a person who is paid to think?

Carol's not-so-secret desire is to kill her evil boss.

I used to work at a mountain resort where the skunks would walk through the kitchen without fear.

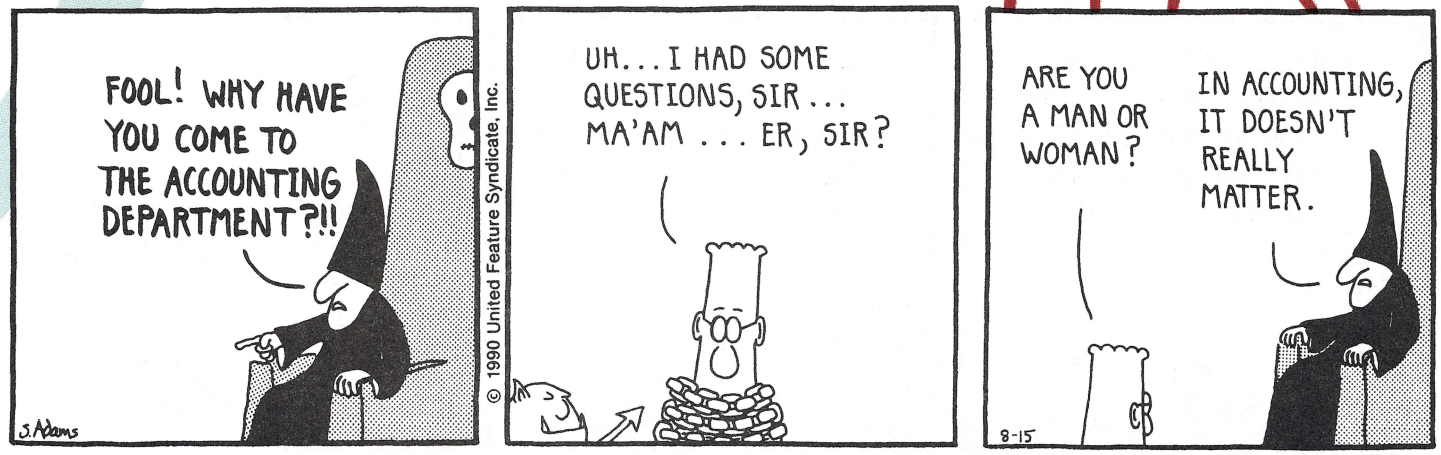


Some of my worst business experiences involve accounting.

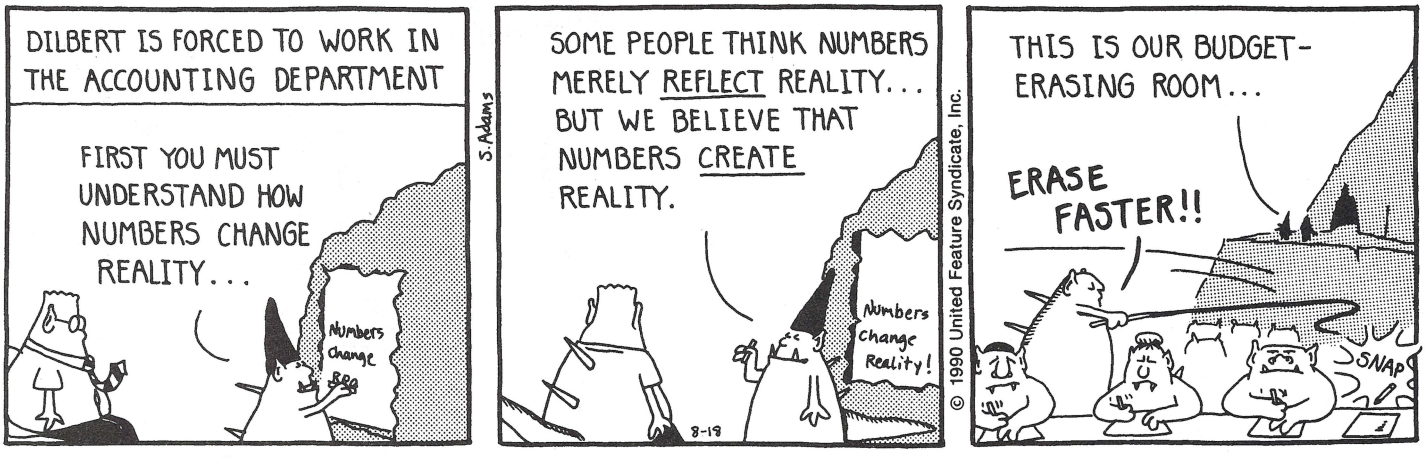
CRITTERS

Miscellaneous Critters Some people remind me of particular animals. I love to substitute the actual animal for human beings in the strip because it sends such a clear message. Everyone understands what I mean when I represent the accounting department as trolls or the marketing guy as a weasel. When Dilbert's blind date turns out to be a literal dog it seems oddly familiar.

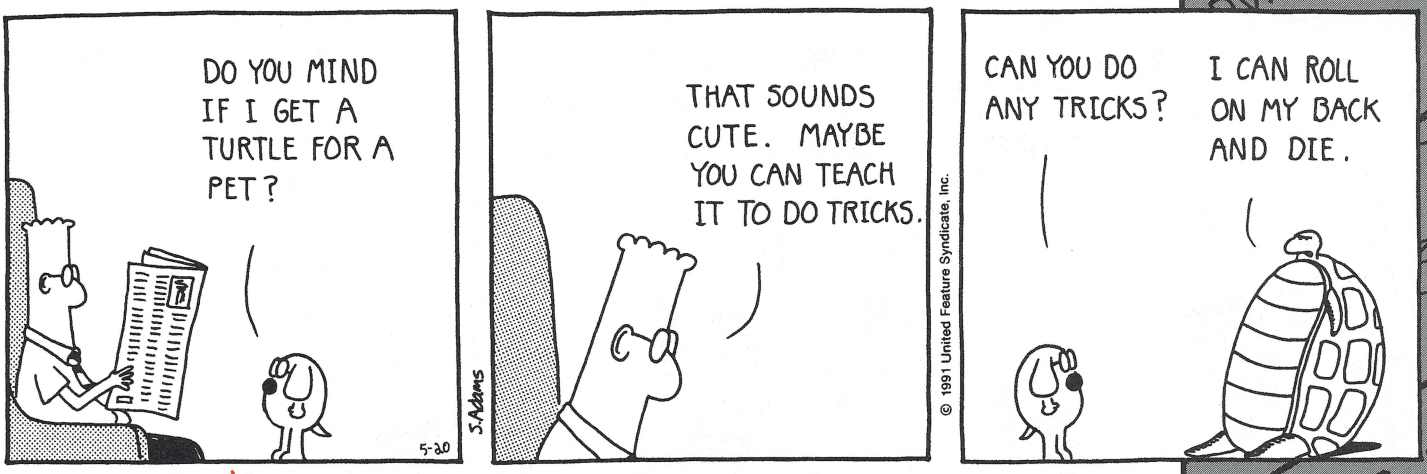
Here are some of my favorite strips that feature animals and other strange creatures.



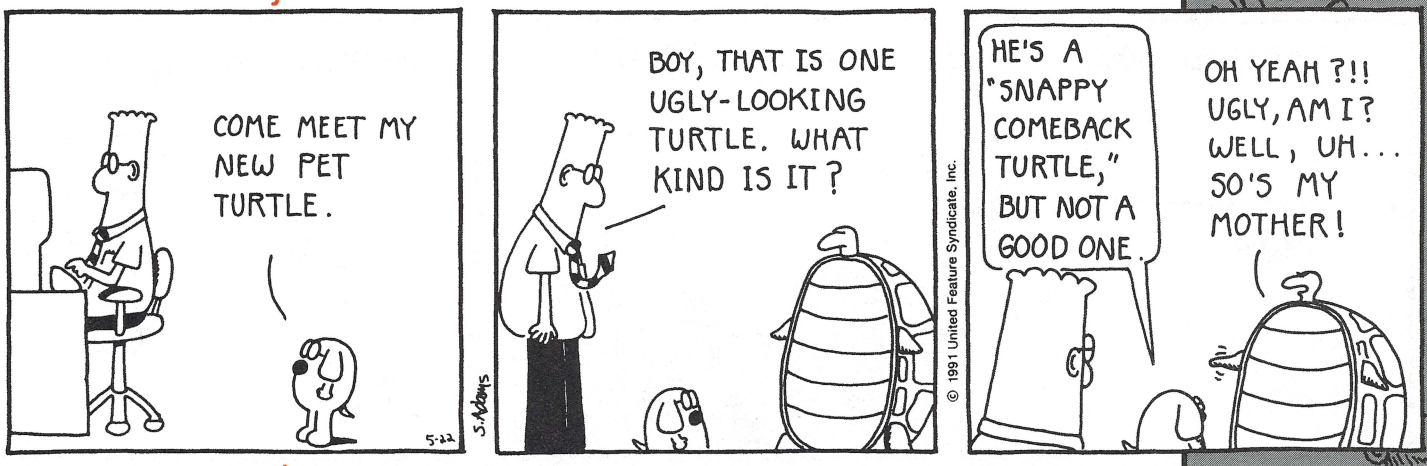
Do any accountants in big companies have good attitudes?



← People who work with numbers start to believe this.

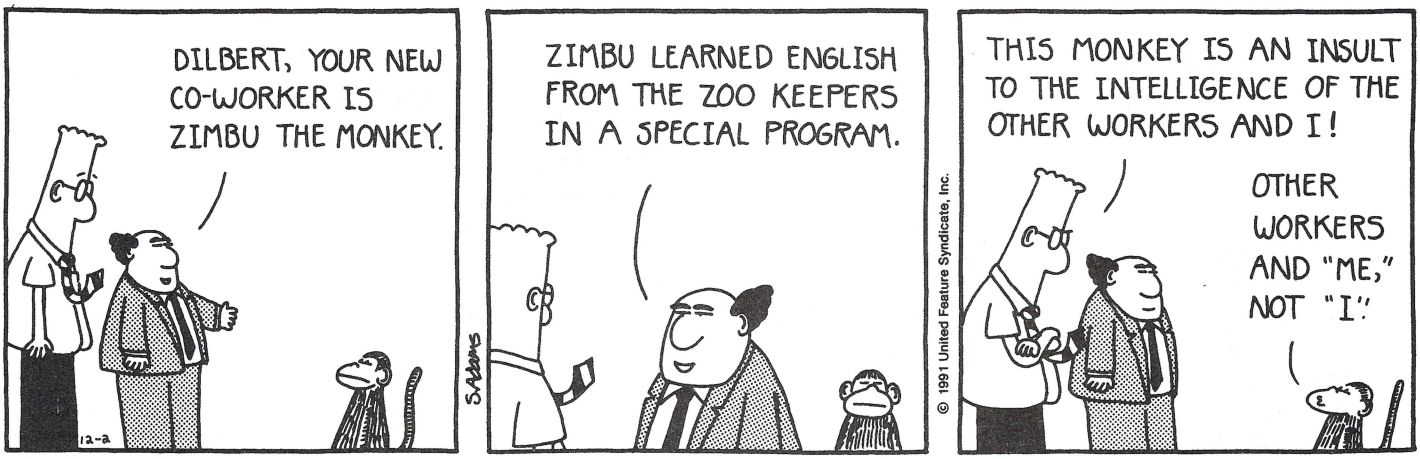


Turtles seem like the dumbest pets to have. Even the "Pet Rock" had funny instructions.



You see, turtles are slow...

This is just like my dinosaur egg joke you saw earlier.



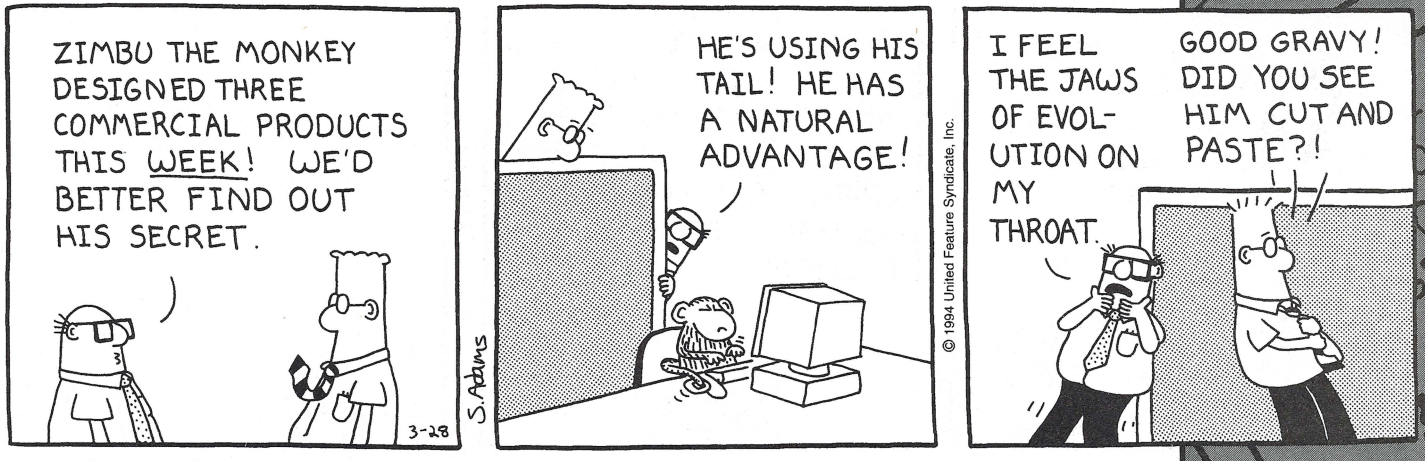
Much of my cubicle jobs could have been done by monkeys.

whenever there was a loud noise, the cubicles looked like prairie dog habitats.

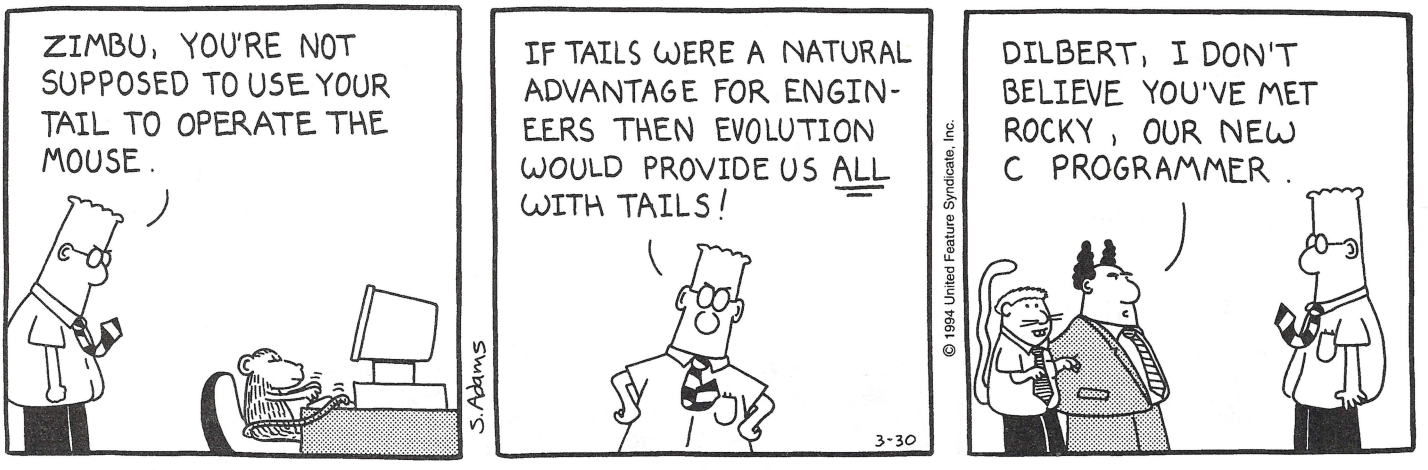
I love the concept of a lazy beaver. But he doesn't fit into the strip.

I think it's the coffee cup that sells this character.

I made up the name Zimbu because it sounds like a monkey name to me.

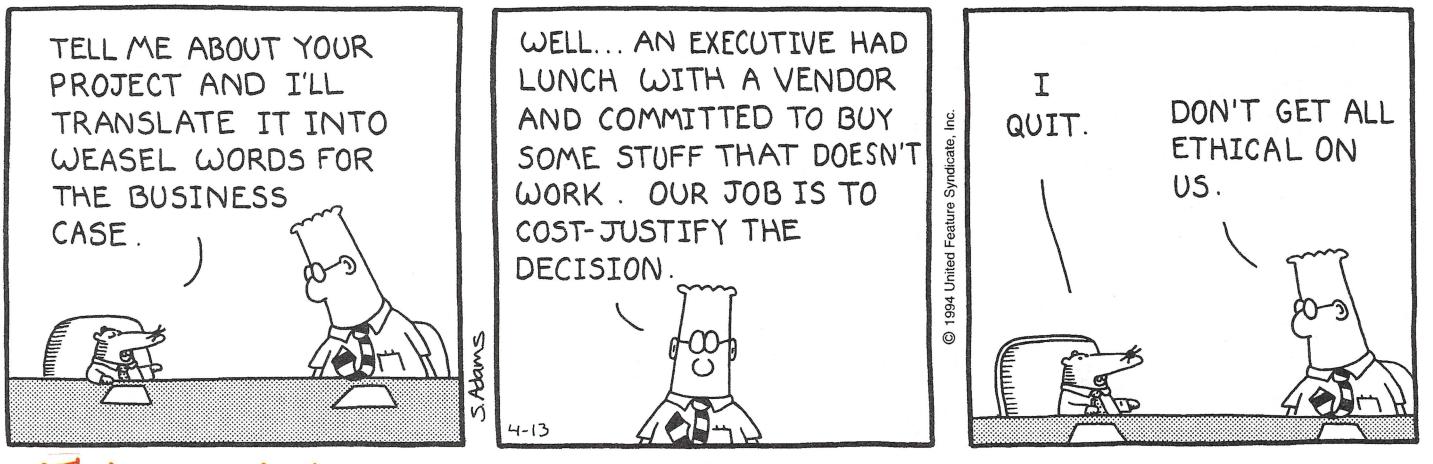


Why don't people have tails?



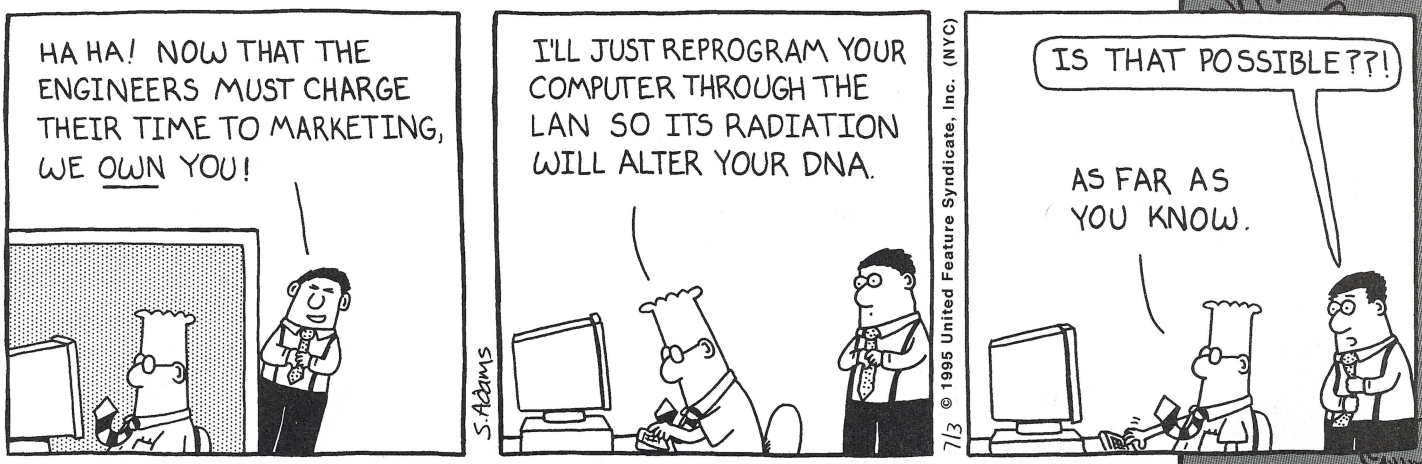
I wish I had a tail.

Some day we'll look back and be amazed that we put up with cubicles.

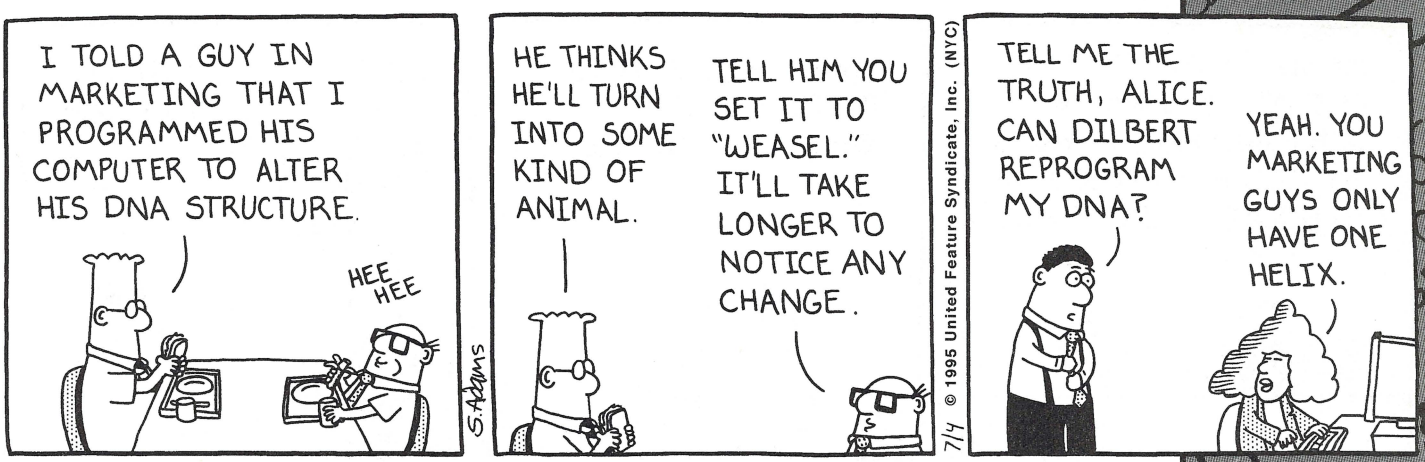


This used to be my job, but I was less ethical.

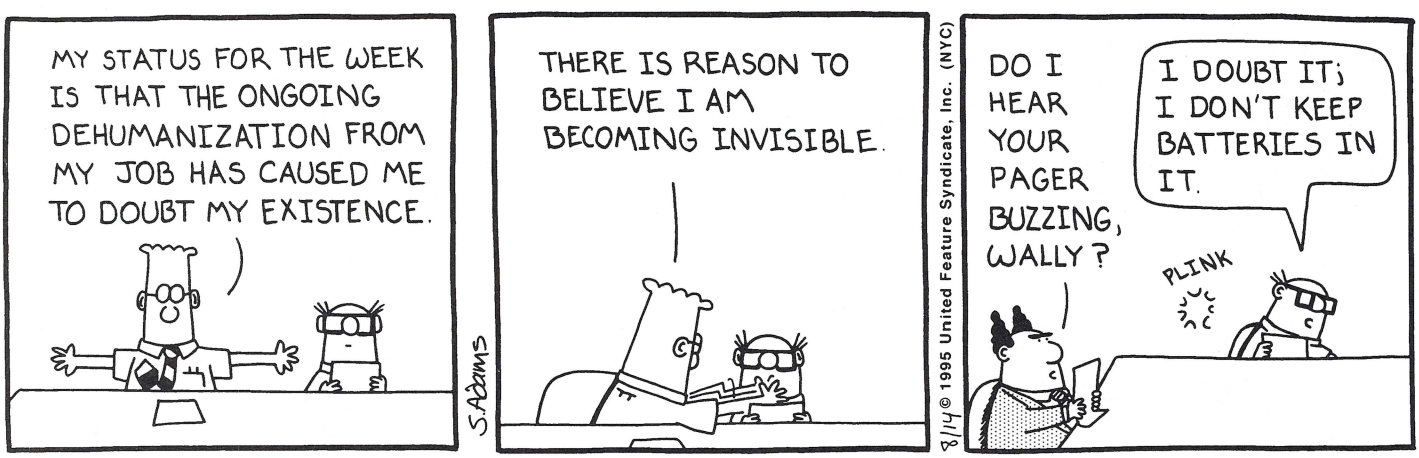
The harder you prepare, the less likely the meeting will happen.



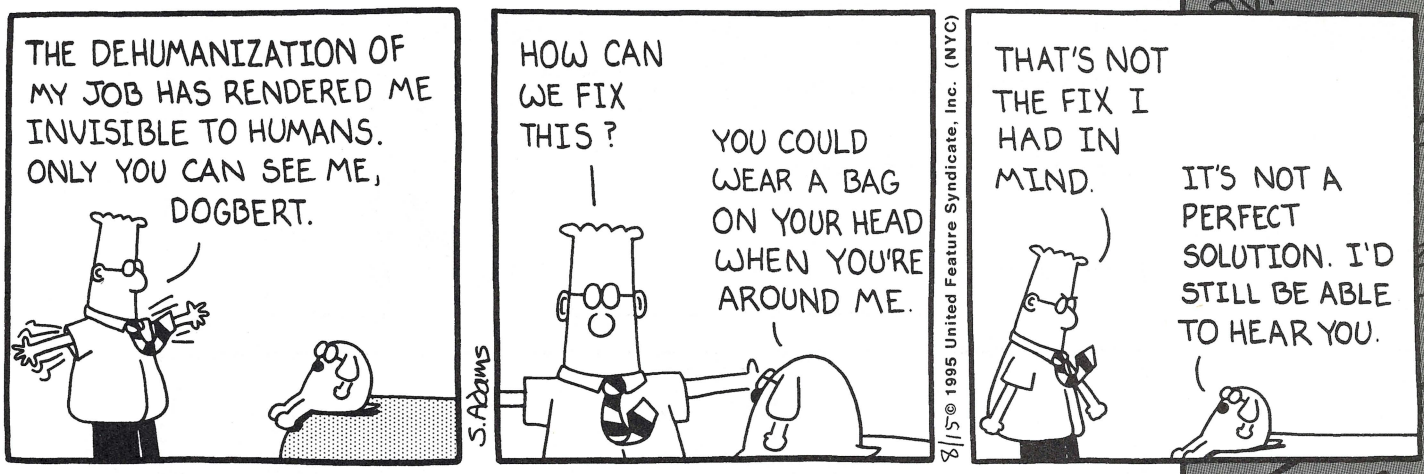
This is the only defense the engineers have.



People would be much cuter if we all had round noses and big whiskers.

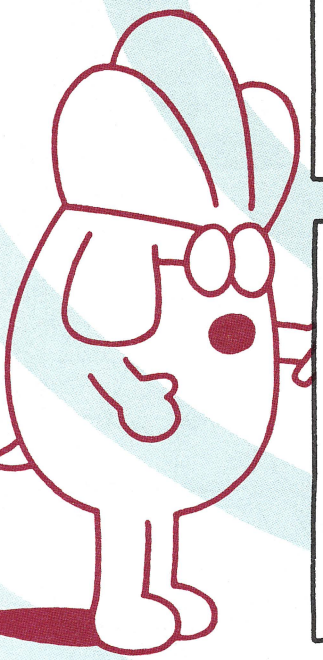


I've had this feeling.



The only cure for workplace invisibility is to screw something up.

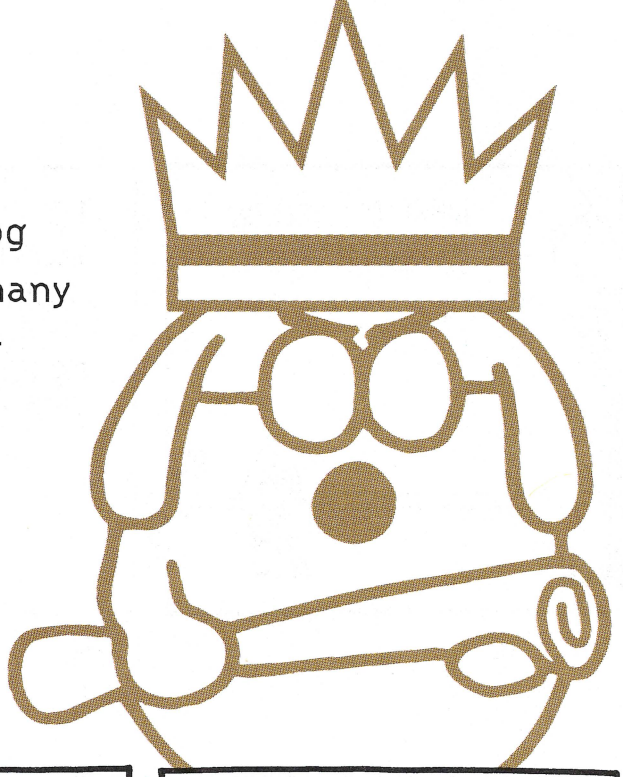
I got a complaint from a Colombian who didn't like the coffee reference.

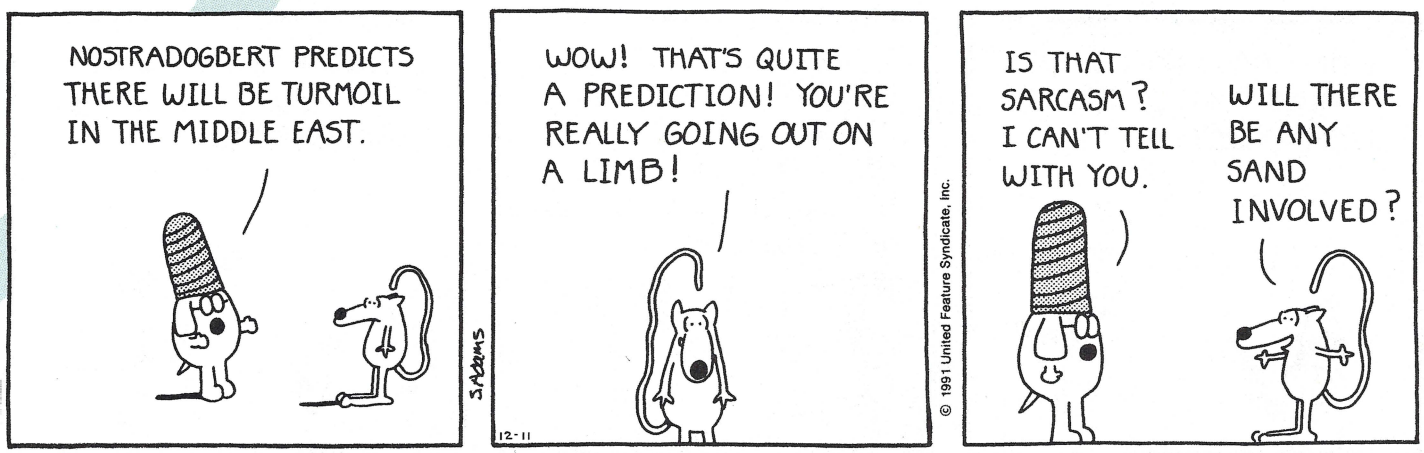


I'm always shy in restaurants.

DOGBERT

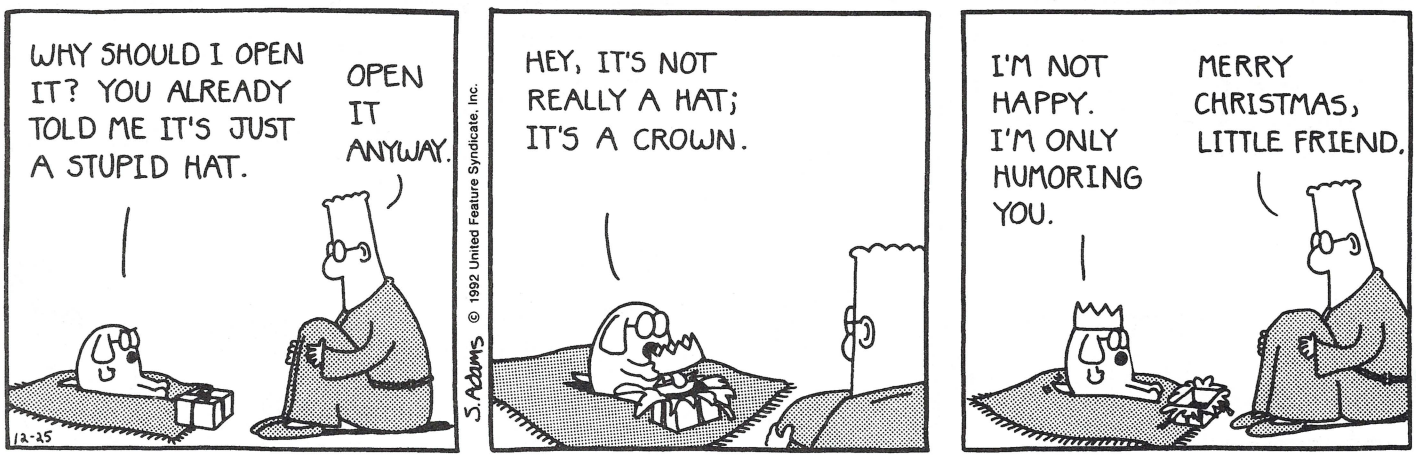
Dogbert in Hats There are few things in life that are as funny as a dog in a hat. Since Dogbert doesn't have many facial cues—no visible mouth or eyes—I can convey a lot about what he's thinking by giving him a funny hat.





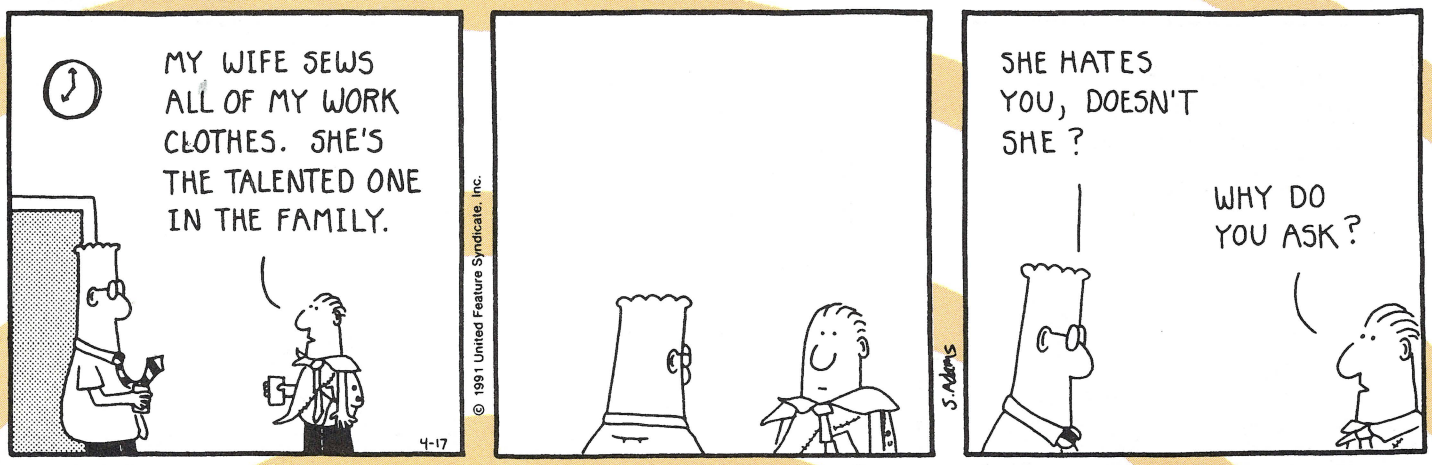
The top of Dogbert's head is hard to draw. So I like hiding it with hats.

It's true!

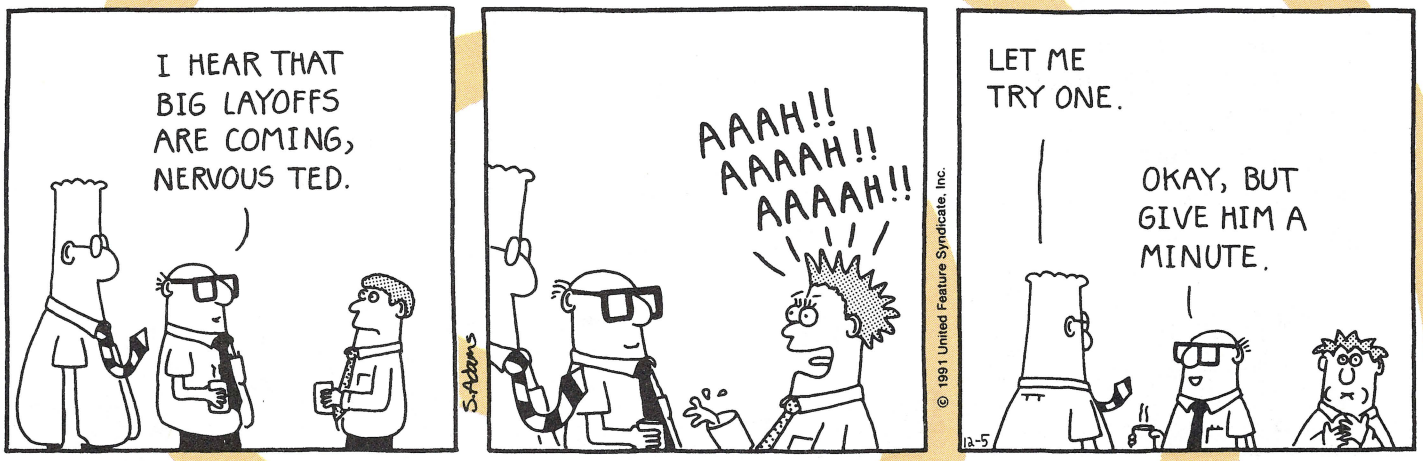


This hat design comes from a fancy folded napkin.

How many times have you heard that one?



This was based on a co-worker whose wife made his business suits.

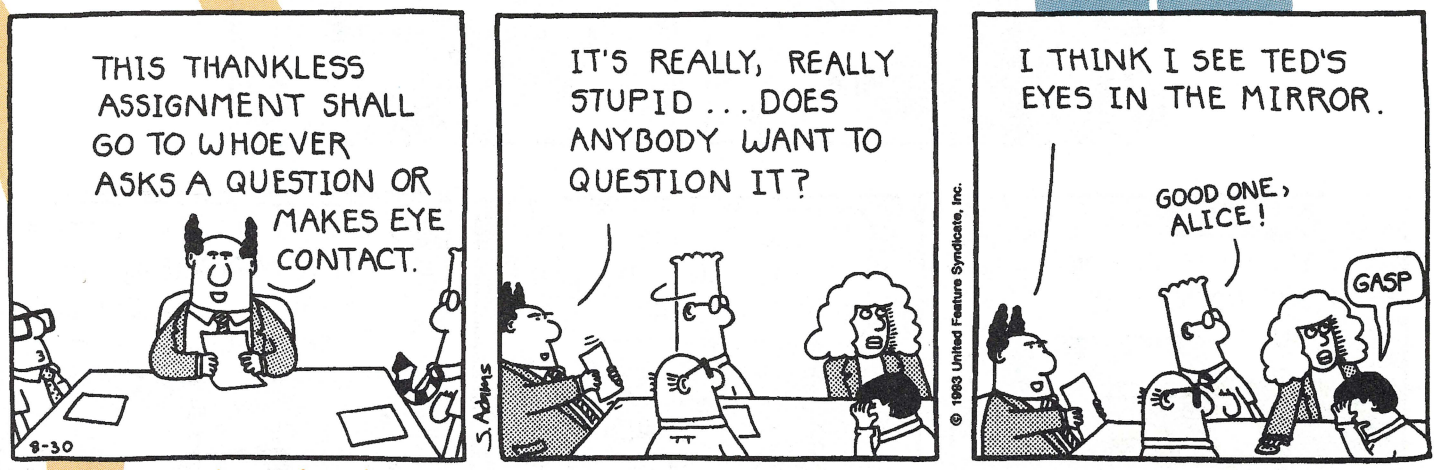


The little dot-shading in Ted's hair is a pain, so now I just ink it black.

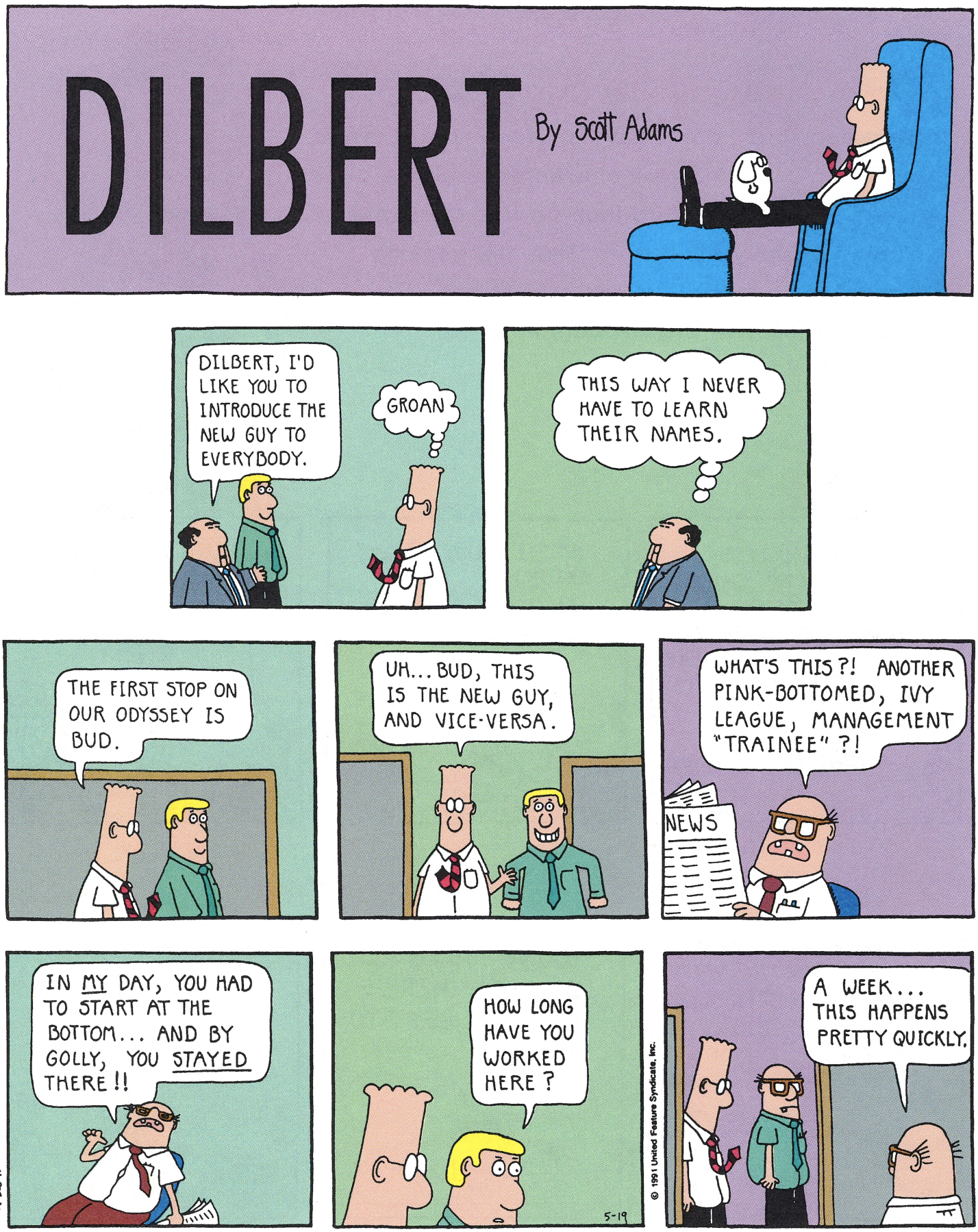
This is the most common "generic guy" I draw.

Ted the Generic Guy

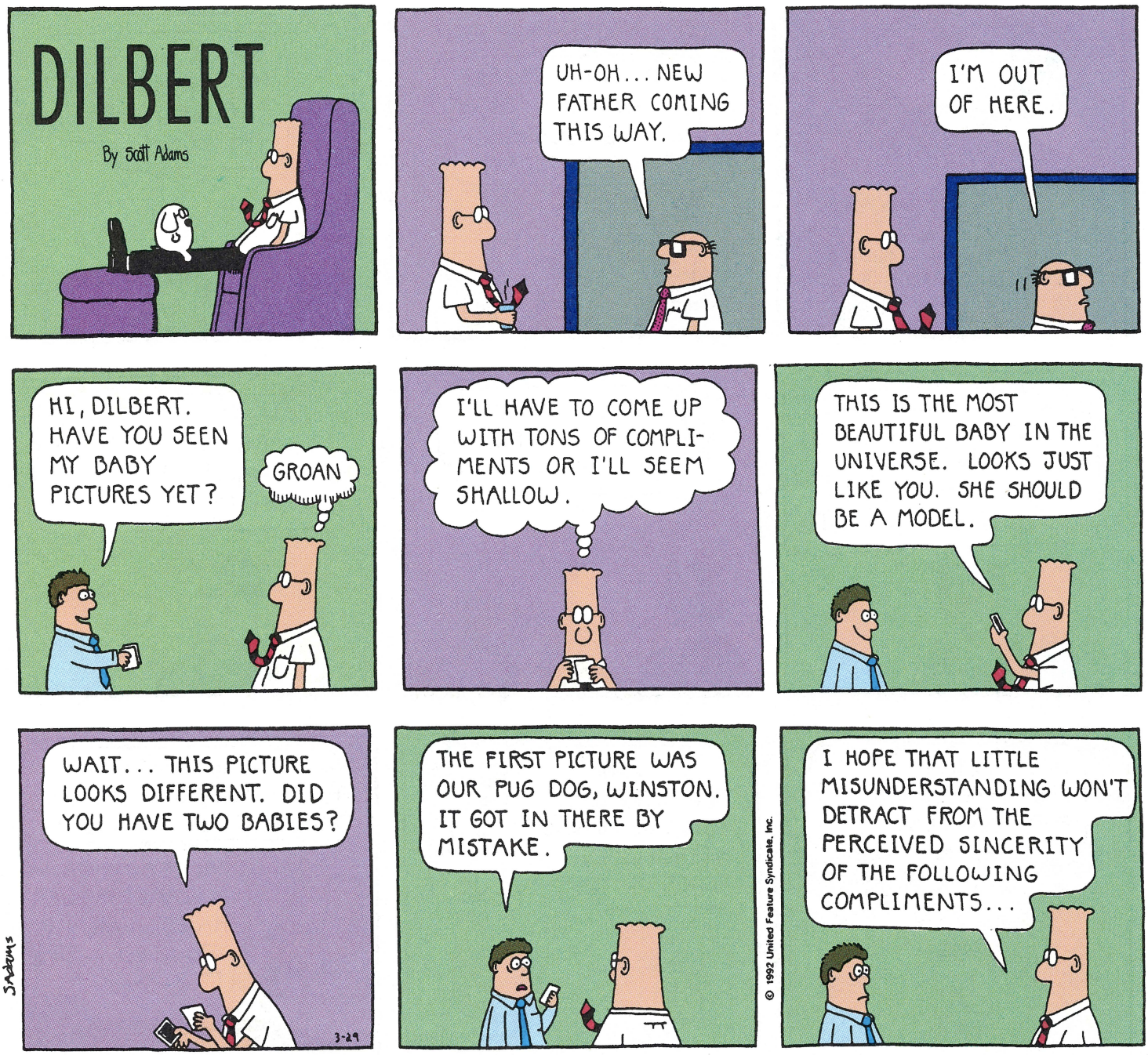
Maybe you've noticed, but I don't have a wide artistic range. So when I need a new character to play a bit part, it often ends up looking like the same guy. Privately I call him "Ted, the generic guy," even though he sometimes has other aliases in the cartoon. Here are the many faces of Ted.



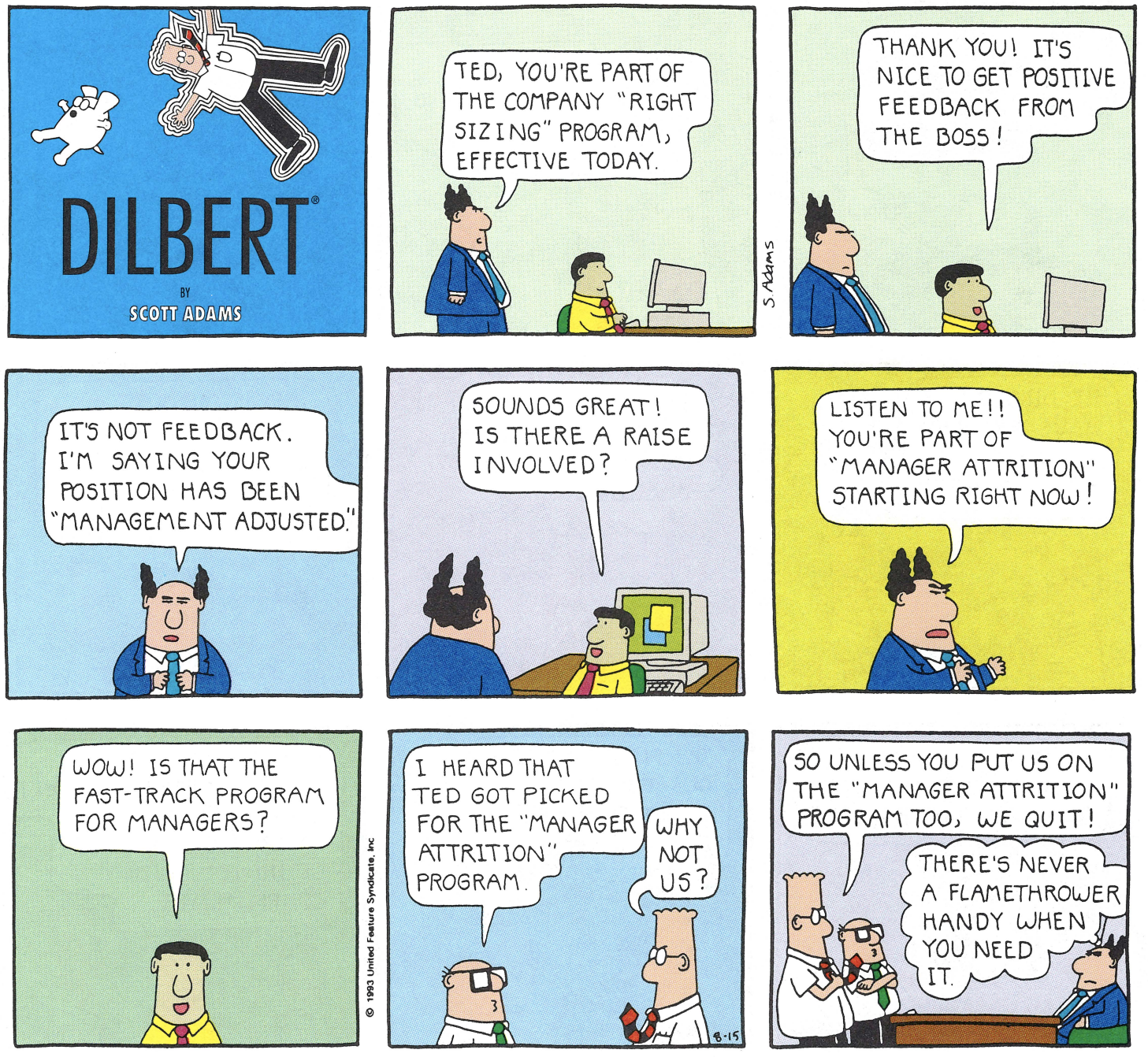
Ted started to be a regular but the other characters were more interesting.



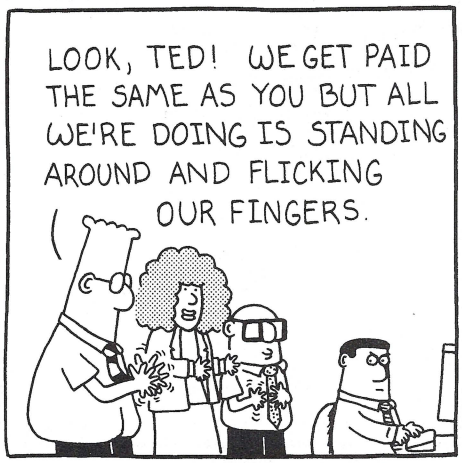
I met a "Bud" on my first day of work.



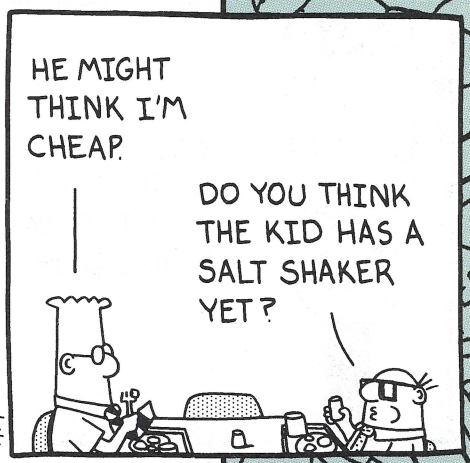
Could we all just agree that babies are ugly and leave it at that?

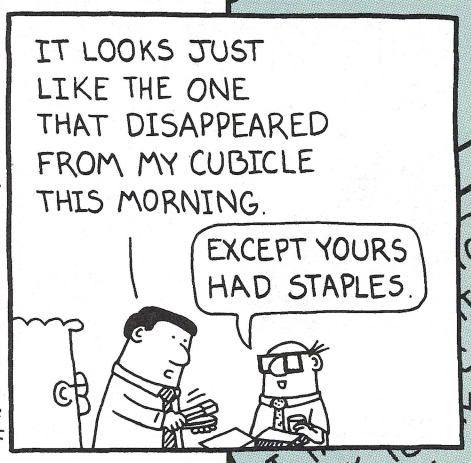


If I have to fire or kill someone, it's often the generic guy.

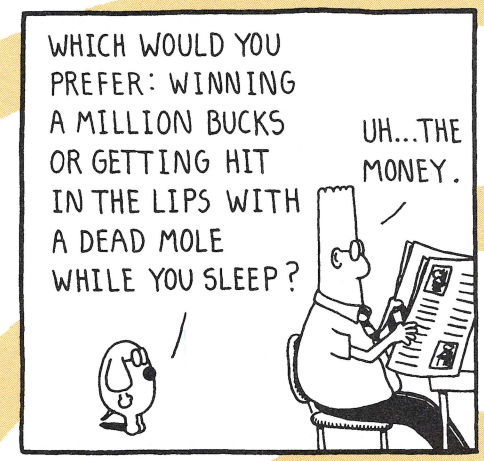


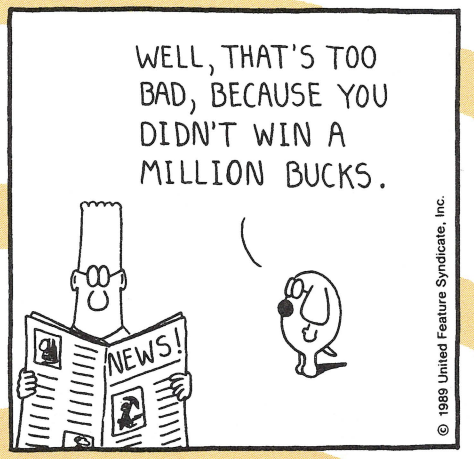
↖ often he gets no lines.

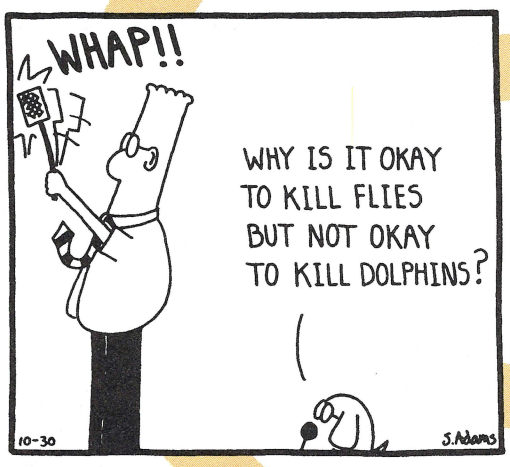


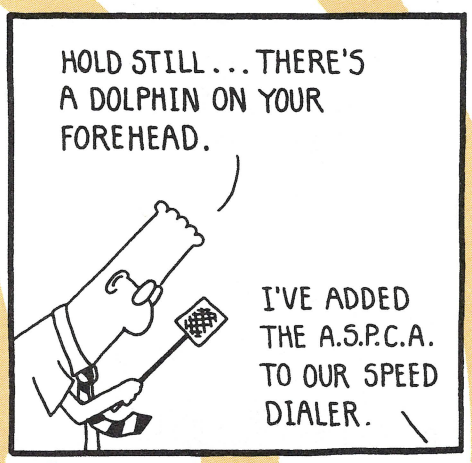


Sometimes Ted has dot eyes instead of ʘʘ eyes.

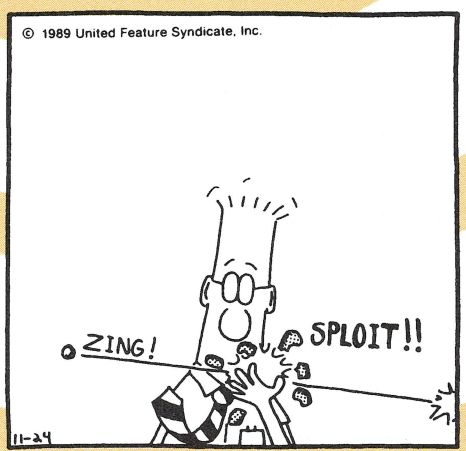


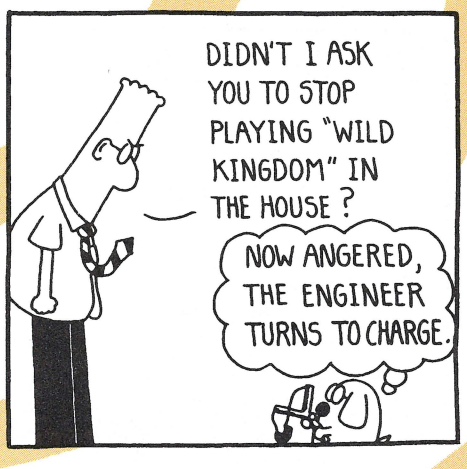






It's not good to think about these things.



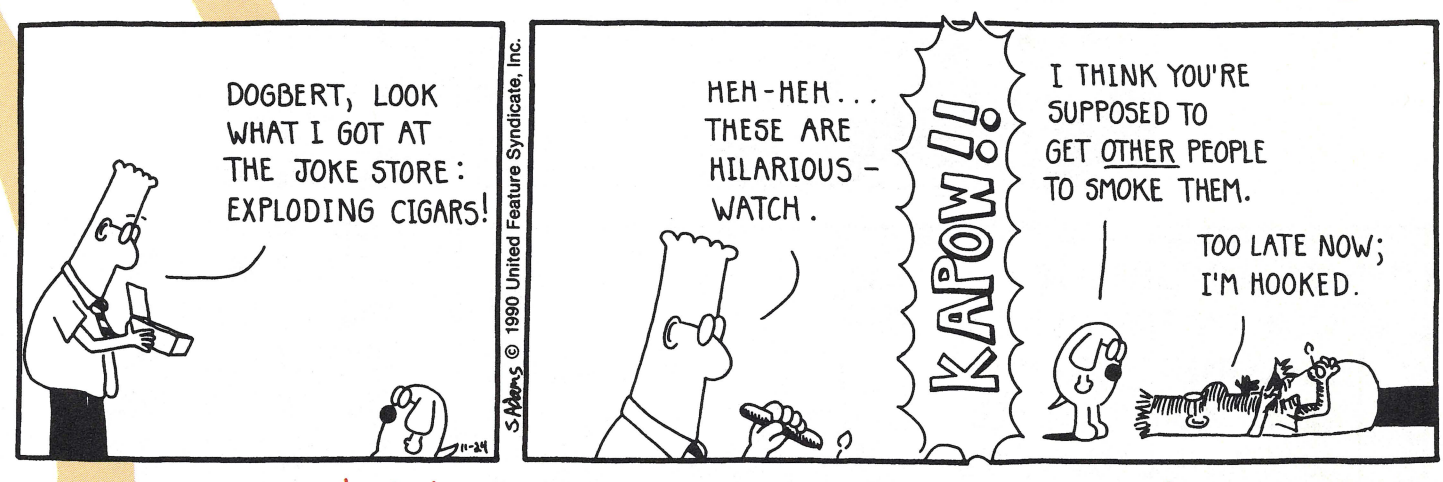


Only jelly donuts make the "sploit" noise.

SLAPSTICK

Slapstick Strips One of the advantages of comics is that people who deserve a slap or a wedgie can get one. But it has to be carefully done to avoid complaints. For example, it's funny when a dog smacks a person, but I could never get away with having a person smack a dog—that would be cruel.

Here's a selection of my favorite slapstick strips, proving once again that violence can be funny.

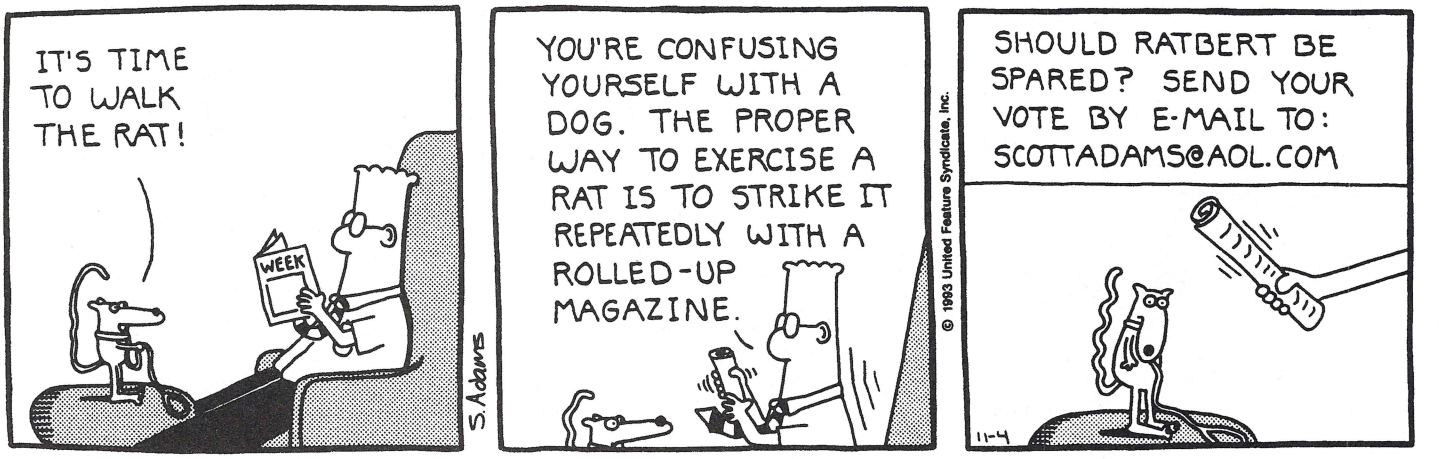


I think you could get people hooked on exploding cigars if you marketed them well.

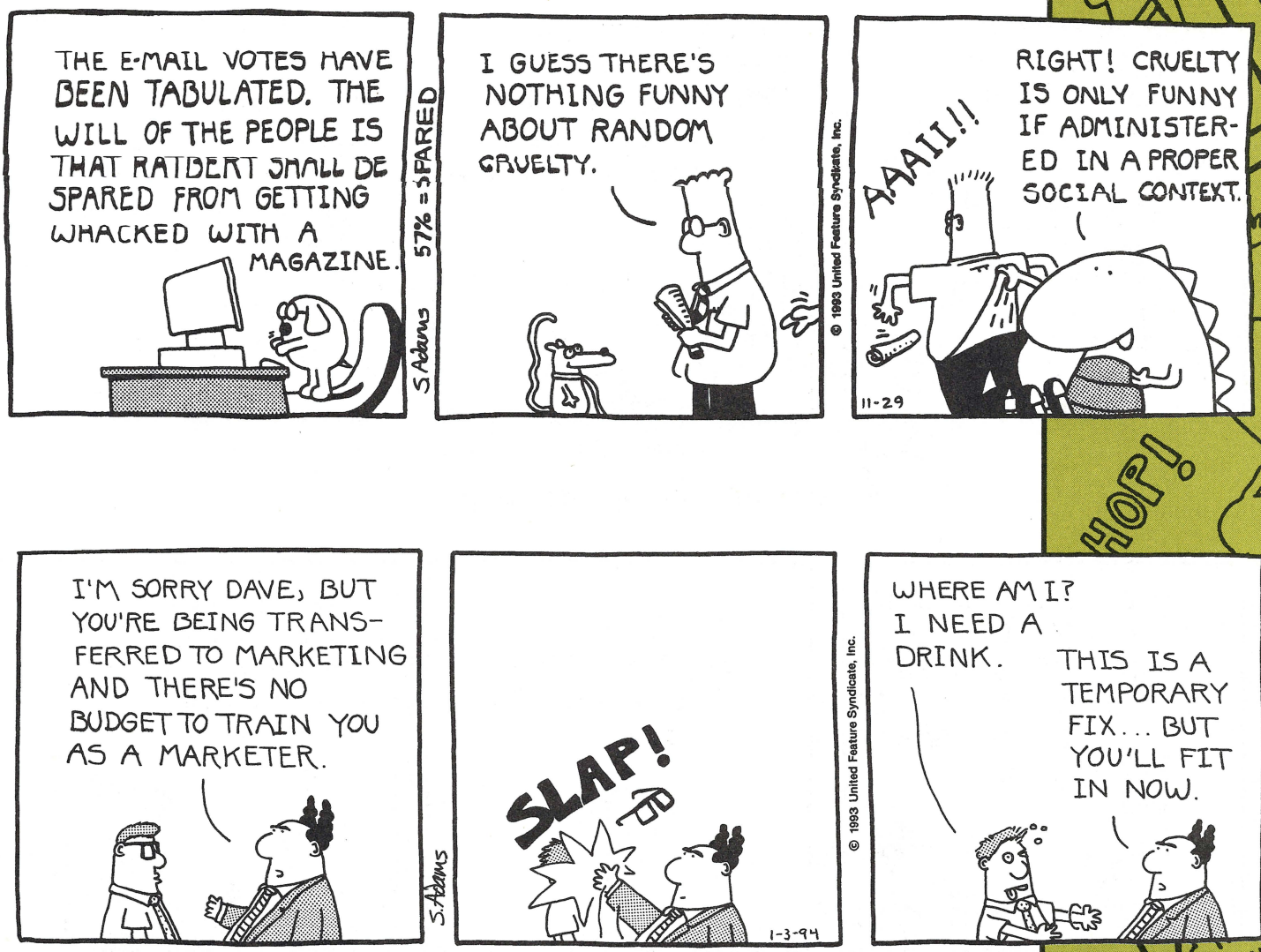
Dilbert got tarred and feathered, in case it's hard to tell.

Wouldn't this be fun?

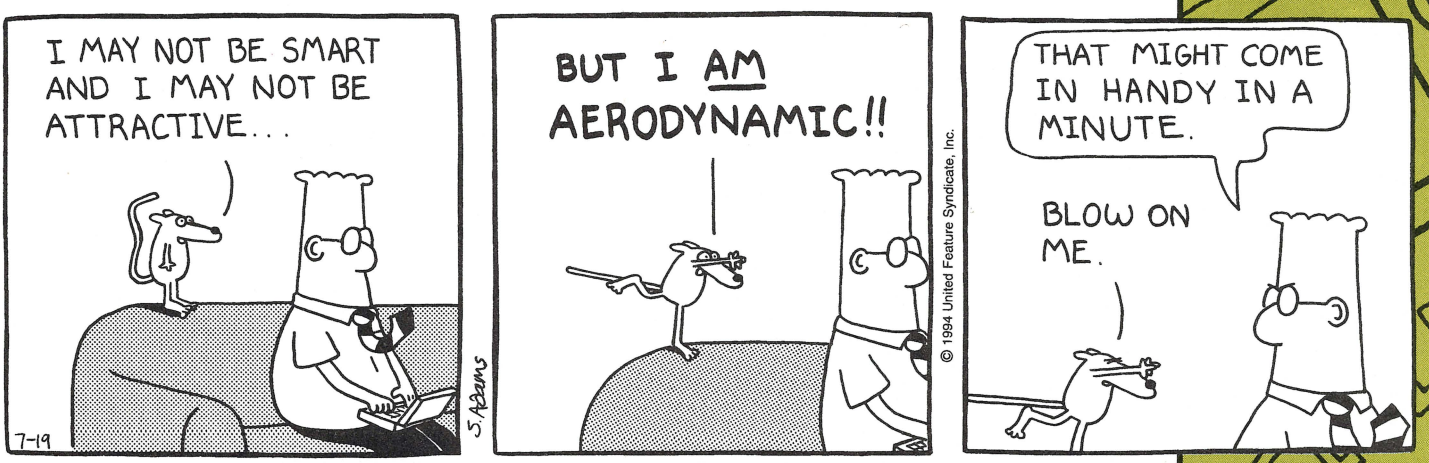
Morale is a two-way street.



Don't send your vote. He was spared.

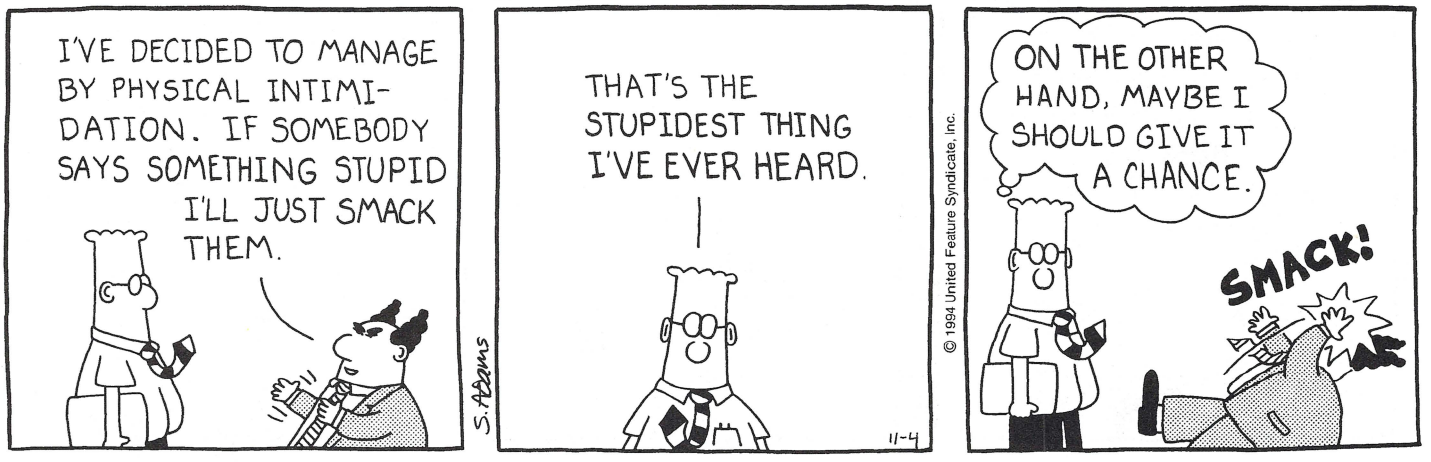


I was in a bad mood when I drew this.

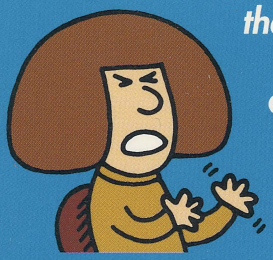


It sounds naughty, but it isn't.

Dog hits man is funny, but not the other way around.

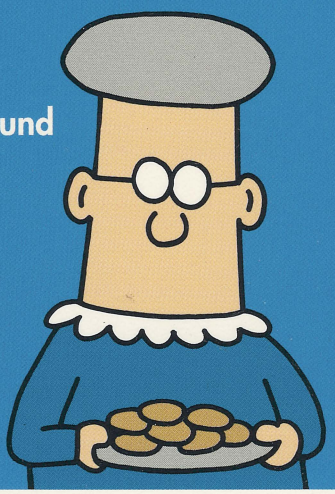


Since its debut in 1989, DILBERT has become *the* comic strip sensation, attracting fans from all corridors of working life. As DILBERT's popularity has grown, so has curiosity about the man behind the drawing table. *Seven Years of Highly Defective People* is filled with Scott Adams' handwritten notes—notes that answer provocative questions such as, *Which characters became unexpected "regulars"?, What objects are the most challenging to draw?*, and *Which strips became the biggest hits?* This unique treasury is a tour of the origins and evolution of DILBERT's cast, and your tour guide is DILBERT's creator.



Each chapter chronicles a different character using selected cartoons (from previous books) to illustrate each one's development. Scott Adams tells where the characters came from, why they do the things they do, and just what the heck he was thinking during the creative process. (Our theory is he was just tired.) You'd have to be an "In*duh*vidual" to miss out on this special collection.

DILBERT appears in more than 1,600 newspapers and can be found on the Internet @ www.unitedmedia.com.



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